

CHACAL

The Magazine Of Fantasy & SF

BOK • CORBEN • FABIAN • FRAZETTA • C.L. MOORE • REH • REAMY • WAGNER • WALDROP





Illustration by Jon Gerung

CHACAL

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Special thanks this issue go to Pat Cadigan, Jeff Easley, Jim Loehr,
Tom Reamy and Allan Wilde.

This issue dedicated to:
STERANKO

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cast & credits

Within the span of a few short months **Marcus Boas** has become a much sought after commercial artist. A self-taught craftsman in his early twenties, Marc's work can be seen elsewhere within the *Rogues In The House* and *The Last Celt* volumes from Donald M. Grant. A confirmed REH fan, it only seems appropriate that we commissioned him to illustrate "The Road of Azrael" this time at bat.

Clyde Caldwell, a popular fan artist just coming into his own, can best be described as a designer rather than "simply an illustrator." Each example of his work flows naturally, beautifully accenting, rather than detracting from, the accompanying prose—which is why we gave him the difficult task of illustrating Howard's poem "Singapore Nell." A Stars & Bars toter from North Carolina, the prolific Mr. Caldwell's work can be seen in *Fantasy Crossroads* and *Graphic Visions*.

Richard Corben's totem is undoubtedly the air-brush. An artist respected in many fields, Rich makes his living as a comic and book illustrator—with a little filmmaking tossed in for fun. His "Daemon" this issue should rekindle memories of C. L. Moore's classic story.

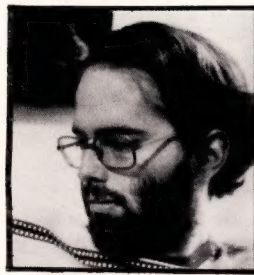
Having only a semester to go in art school, **Jeff Easley** is one of those developing talents you're constantly hearing about yet very seldom see. With an eye on a career as a commercial illustrator, we hope that his cover painting and Kane folio this issue will give him some much-needed exposure—if anyone deserves a fan following, Jeff does!

When a list is compiled of the fans' favorite artists, **Steve Fabian's** name is inevitably near the top and probably underlined. Well-known throughout the field for his delicate stipple shading technique, Stephen's been nominated for a brace of Hugos and with crossed fingers, maybe this is the year he'll win one. After coming through for us at the last minute for his illo for "The End of Days," he's got our vote anyway!

Women seem to be **Frank Frazetta's** forte... and who can argue with the taste of one of, if not *the*, best known fantasy artists working today. His drawing of a wolf and his pretty companion this issue, while not of the finished quality he's capable of, will prove to his fans that F. F. still has that old magic.

Rising from the deserts of Arizona, much like the proverbial phoenix, comes **Jon Gerung**, artist par excellence! A writer as well, Jon will have a comic strip titled "Sadistica" printed later this year which employs some beautiful airbrush work. Gerung's material, as you can see, is quite detailed and complex; if you can't ferret out all of the elements at a glance, don't worry—we're still finding new ones we missed!

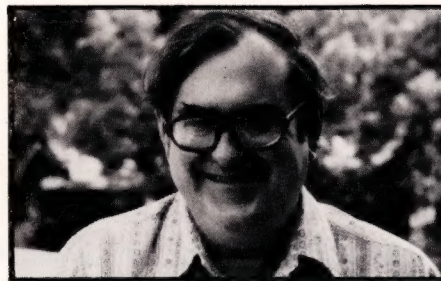
Robert E. Howard has long been thought of as one of the founding fathers of modern epic fantasy with his stable of exotic characters, from Conan to El Borak. A cult has grown up around his creations since his suicide in 1936 to the point that he's on the list as one of the most marketable authors in the field



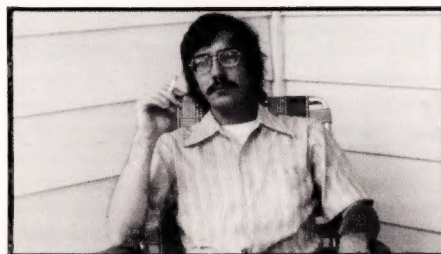
Easley



Howard



Reamy



Smith



Wagner



Waldrop

of American literature. "The Road of Azrael," a previously unpublished Middle Eastern adventure, is an imaginative bit of writing that blends a variety of cultures as only REH could—not always plausible, but a heckuva lot of fun!

Acclaimed in many circles for his artwork featured in Grant's Conan hardback, *People of the Black Circle*, **David Ireland** is, oddly enough, an extremely hard artist to pin down to a single genre. Seemingly suited to any subject matter, Dave's illustration for "Mistress of Windraven" shows his style at its most polished form.

Ben Indick likes to refer to himself as "the grand old red-headed fan." While his days are spent dealing drugs to the masses (don't get shook—he's a pharmacist!) a strange desire comes over him when the sun sets and he becomes a self-styled Noel Coward of New Jersey. In what we hope will only be the first of a series of contributions to our pages, Ben reminisces about his friend **Hannes Bok** with a skill and wit that tells much more about his subject than any other writer could hope to do.

When asked for an accompanying tag-line for his story "Mistress of Windraven," **Tom Reamy** replied, "She wanted true love, but only got pure animal lust." What else would you expect from a Nebula Award winner (for his novella "San Diego Lightfoot Sue") and Hugo nominee? Well, **Nickelodeon** No. 2 for one thing—but that's another tale! One thing that Tom's story proves is that if the bottom falls out of the SF market, he could always write a catchy novel for Harlequin—with a bit of his Texas humor thrown in for good measure, of course.

David C. Smith can tell a horror story better than most—and we're not referring to his prose; rather to his tales of how paperback publishers like to screw over up-coming authors. But we'll save those stories until Halloween and instead present to you "The End of Days."

If anyone has earned the title of "innovator" in recent years, it must be **Karl Edward Wagner**. Recipient of last year's August Derleth Fantasy Award, Wagner's "acid-gothic" style is taking the field literally by storm. KANE has proved to be his most popular creation and it's easy to see why. In a genre populated largely by ignorant barbarians and lackluster wizards, KANE is a breath of fresh air—a character who walks the grey line between good and evil, sometimes swaying from one side to the other. "Sing A Last Song of Valdesse" is one of Karl's most intriguing adventures; something much more than a tale of vengeance.

On the surface, "Der Untergang des Abendlandes" (what?!) may seem like a satire to some—until the chilling ending. Author **Howard Waldrop** digs deep into our souls and makes us wonder in awe just *who* deserves the title of "monster." Yet another of that breed of Texans, Howard is one of those fellows you can't help but like. With a humanistic style, he's helping to add a new dimension to fantasy and SF.

Editorial B.S.



The butterfly in my stomach's waving to you, friends, but I'm trying desperately not to acknowledge his existence. Why? Because he's making it awfully difficult to write a half-way decent introductory editorial. First impressions are important, they tell me with knowing smiles, and who am I to disagree? You'd think that with four issues of *Lone Star Fictioneer* under my belt witty comments and profound statements would roll off of the tongue and endear all of you unsuspecting folks into our web. Not so simple, I'm afraid.

CHACAL is an experiment of sorts, I suppose; one that I hope will be termed "successful." As a bit of explanation, the title is the French term for "jackal," a creature whose nourishment is gained from feeding off of any and every thing. Symbolic? Naturally.

We're going to attempt to span the genres through the magazine, exploring the various facets of fantasy and science fiction without turning off the fringe fans or the dyed-in-the-wool enthusiasts. A something for everyone approach is the policy we're trying for; one that will give the pessimist a smile of satisfaction and the optimist an extra spark of light in the darkness. But I suppose our major goal is to try to broaden the horizon of those that suffer from tunnel vision, those that can't see beyond or be entertained by anything but their own limited interests. With an idealistic gleam in my eye I can't help but feel that the fantasy field in general can grow and expand only if people will allow themselves to experience a variety of subjects—to feed and nourish their imaginations.

On occasion, the contents may not appeal to you—perhaps there's too strong a heroic fantasy flavor for your taste in one issue or too strong a sf flavor in another. All I ask is that you at least try it... and tell us what you think, for God's sake. Suggest, criticize, or kibitz, but at least respond to our efforts. Your honest reactions are what will make the magazine worthwhile, and perhaps a bit more regular. We're trying to reach *you* through CHACAL; let us know you're there.

The future looks bright, I feel, and through a bit of arm-twisting we've been able to gather contributions from a number of talented writers and artists—regular features concerning a variety of topics are in production that should prove of interest. We're letting our ambitions run rampant, much like a kid in a candy store, and we've got notions of shaking some folks up. Keep an eye open, *husoors* and *mem-sabs*, because we haven't the foggiest idea of what "can't" means...

Arnie Fenner

Coming

TIM KIRK!

Multiple Hugo winner Tim Kirk will begin his continuing series of cartoons that will poke a bit of good-natured fun at fandoms and their "deities." Light-hearted humor as only Kirk is capable of!



FICTION BY:

Robert E. Howard
Karl Edward Wagner
Manly Wade Wellman
M. M. Moamrath
And More!

ART BY:

George Barr
James Steranko
Jeff Easley
John Severin
Steve Fabian
And More!

DESTINY!

A special photographic fantasy portfolio featuring *Destiny*, fandom's sweetheart, has been commissioned for CHACAL No. 2. Heidi Saha eat your heart out!



Life at last! Welcome to the premiere issue of CHACAL. Glad to see you all here. In this and future issues, we hope to provide fantasy and science fiction fans with an alternative to the older, more established publications. If all works out as planned, we'll be furnishing a showcase for new talent, a lucrative market for the old pros and a bit of fun for everyone.

Although the contents of this issue lean towards heroic fantasy, we'll be touching a lot more bases in the future; fantasy/adventure/science fiction/weird genres will all be represented in time to come. After a year of publishing and editing *REH: Lone Star Fictioneer*, Arnie and I were beginning to feel trapped by the limitations we had placed on ourselves. Since both of us are interested in work by authors other than Robert E. Howard, the decision was made to let *LSF* lay dormant for a while so we could concentrate our efforts into a more personally satisfying direction. CHACAL seems to be closer to my own interests and I hope that you'll find it more entertaining as well. Pointing a publication down a less-traveled path is always spooky, so be sure to drop us a letter or card giving us your thoughts on this issue. God willing, there'll be a letters column next time (if we get enough response) so your efforts won't be in vain.

I have always felt that a lot of talent was going un-noticed simply for lack of a market; to remedy this, there will be *at least* one piece of work by developing artists of one school or another in each issue. Perhaps more, if we get enough submissions from all you talented unknowns out there. Remember, we are actively seeking work by fresh, lesser-known talents—if you think you can make the grade send your samples (be it art or prose) to us and we'll give it a look, fair enough?

Although we're making a change in direction, Arnold and I feel a certain responsibility to bring our audience (that's *you*!) the highest quality material available to us. We've sharpened our axes with earlier projects—now we plan to attack the forest in earnest. Take a chance: step into a world inhabited by gothic novelists, apparitions, sorcery and *nosferatu* (as well as an occasional cowboy or two)... enjoy the trip and remember to come back again because each new journey is different from the last.

In the words of the prophet: "The best part of a boring speech is its conclusion." The prophet was right. Take care.

Byron L. Roark



Illustration by Marcus Boas

THE ROAD OF AZRAEL



by ROBERT E. HOWARD



Chapter 1.

*Towers reel as they burst asunder,
Streets run red in the butchered
town;
Standards fall and the lines go under
And the iron horsemen ride me down.
Out of the strangling dust around me
Let me ride for my hour is nigh,
From the walls that prison, the hoofs
that ground me,
To the sun and the desert wind to die.*



Ilaho Akbar! There is no God but God. These happenings I, Kosru Malik, chronicle that men may know truth thereby. For I have seen madness beyond human reckoning; aye, I have ridden the road of Azrael that is the Road of Death, and have seen mailed men fall like garnered grain; and here I detail the truths of that madness and of the doom of Kizilshehr the Strong, the Red City, which has faded like a summer cloud in the blue skies.

Thus was the beginning. As I sat in peace in the camp of Muhammad Khan, sultan of Kizilshehr, conversing with divers warriors on the merits of the verses of one Omar Khayyam, a tentmaker of Nishapur and a daughty toper, suddenly I was aware that one came close to me, and I felt anger burn in his gaze, as a man feels the eyes of a hungry tiger upon him. I looked up and as the firelight took his bearded face, I felt my own eyes blaze with an old hate. For it was Moktra Mirza, the Kurd, who stood above me and there was an old feud between us. I have scant love for any Kurd, but this dog I hated. I had not known he was in the camp of Muhammad Khan, whither I had ridden alone at dusk, but where the lion feasts, there the jackals gather.

No word passed between us. Moktra Mirza had his hand on his blade and when he saw he was perceived, he drew with a rasp of steel. But he was slow as an ox. Gathering my feet under me, I shot erect, my scimitar springing to my hand and as I leaped I struck, and the keen edge sheared through his neck cords.

Even as he crumpled, gushing blood, I sprang across the fire and ran swiftly through the maze of tents, hearing a clamor of pursuit behind me. Sentries patrolled the camp, and ahead of me I saw one on a tall bay, who sat gaping at me. I wasted no time but

running up to him, I seized him by the leg and cast him from the saddle.

The bay horse reared as I swung up, and was gone like an arrow, I bending low on the saddle-peak for fear of shafts. I gave the bay his head and in an instant we were past the horse-lines and the sentries who gave tongue like a pack of hounds, and the fires were dwindling behind us.

We struck the open desert, flying like the wind, and my heart was glad. The blood of my foe was on my blade, a good steed between my knees, the stars of the desert above me, the night wind in my face. A Turk need ask no more.

The bay was a better horse than the one I had left in the camp, and the saddle was a goodly one, richly brocaded and worked in Persian leather.

For a time I rode with a loose rein, then as I heard no sound of pursuit, I slowed the bay to a walk, for who rides on a weary horse in the desert dices with Death. Far behind me I saw the twinkling of the camp-fires and wondered that a hundred Kurds were not howling on my trail. But so swiftly had the deed been done and so swiftly had I fled, that the avengers were bemused and though men followed, not with hate, they missed my trail in the dark, I learned later.

I had ridden west by blind chance and now I came on to the old caravan route that once led from Edessa to Kizilshehr and Shiraz. Even then it was almost abandoned because of the Frankish robbers. It came to me that I would ride to the caliphs and lend them my sword, so I rode leisurely across the desert which here is very broken land, flat, sandy levels giving way to rugged stretches of ravines and low hills, and these again running out into plains. The breezes from the Persian Gulf cooled me and even while I listened for the drum of hoofs behind me, I dreamed of the days of my early childhood when I rode, night-herding the ponies, on the great upland plains far to the East, beyond the Oxus.

And then after some hours, I heard the sound of men and horses, but from in front of me. Far ahead I made out, in the dim starlight, a line of horsemen and a lurching bulk I knew to be a wagon such as the Persians use to transport their wealth and their harems. Some caravan bound for Muhammad's camp, or for Kizilshehr beyond, I thought, and did not wish to be seen by them, who might put the avengers on my trail.

So I reined aside into a broken maze of

gullies, and sitting my steed behind a huge boulder, I watched the travellers. They approached, my hiding place and I, straining my eyes in the vague light, saw that they were Seljuk Turks, heavily armed. One who seemed a leader sat his horse in a manner somehow familiar to me, and I knew I had seen him before. I decided that the wagon must contain some princess, and wondered at the fewness of the guards. There were not above thirty of them, enough to resist the attack of nomad raiders, no doubt, but certainly not enough to beat off the Franks who were wont to swoop down on Moslem wayfarers. And this puzzled me, because men, horses and wagon had the look of long travel, as if from beyond the Caliphate. And beyond the Caliphate lay a waste of Frankish robbers.

Now the wagon was abreast of me, and one of the wheels creaking in the rough ground lurched into a depression and hung there. The mules, after the manner of mules, lunged once and then ceased pulling, and the rider who seemed familiar rose up with a torch and cursed. By the light of the torch I recognized him—one Abdullah Bey, a Persian noble high in the esteem of Muhammad Khan—a tall, lean man and a somber one, more Arab than Persian.

Now the leather curtains of the wagon parted and a girl looked out—I saw her young face by the flare of the torch. But Abdullah Bey thrust her back angrily and closed the curtains. Then he shouted to his men, a dozen of whom dismounted and put their shoulders to the wheel. With much grunting and cursing they lifted the wheel free, and soon the wagon lurched on again, and it and the horsemen faded and dwindled in my sight until all were shadows far out on the desert.

And I took up my journey again, wondering; for in the light of the torch I had seen the unveiled face of the girl in the wagon, and she was a Frank, and one of great beauty. What was the meaning of Seljuks on the road from Edessa, commanded by a Persian nobleman, and guarding a girl of the Nazarenes? I concluded that these Turks had captured her in a raid on Edessa or the Kingdom of Jerusalem and were taking her to Kizilshehr or Shiraz to sell to some emir, and so dismissed the matter from my mind.

The bay was fresh and I had a mind to put a long way between me and the Persian army, so I rode slowly but steadily all night. And in the first white blaze of dawn, I met a horseman riding hard out of the west.

His steed was a long-limbed roan that reeled from fatigue. The rider was an iron man—clad in close-meshed mail from head to foot, with a heavy vizorless helmet on his head. And I spurred my steed to a gallop for this was a Frank—and he was alone and on a tired horse.

He saw me coming and he cast his long lance into the sand and drew his sword, for he knew his steed was too weary to charge. And as I swooped down as a hawk swoops on its prey, I suddenly gave a shout and lowering my blade, set my steed back on his haunches, almost beside the Frank.

"Now by the beard of the Prophet," said I, "we are well met, Sir Eric de Cogan!"

He gazed at me in surprise. He was no older than I, broad-shouldered, long-limbed, and yellow-haired. Now his face was haggard and weary as if he had ridden hard without sleep, but it was the face of a warrior, as his

body was that of a warrior, I lack but an inch and a fraction of six feet in height as the Franks reckon a man's stature, but Sir Eric was half a head taller.

"You know me," said he, "but I do not remember you."

"Ha!" quoth I, "we Saracens look all alike to you Franks! But I remember you, by Allah! Sir Eric, do you not remember the taking of Jerusalem and the Moslem boy you protected from your own warriors?"

Aye, I remembered! I was but a youth, newly come to Palestine, and I slipped through the beseiging armies into the city the very dawn it fell. I was not used to street-fighting. The noise, the shouting and the crashing of the shattered gates bewildered me, and the dust and the foul smells of the strange city stifled me and maddened me. The Franks came over the walls and red Purgatory broke in the streets of Jerusalem. Their iron horsemen rode over the ruins of the gates and their horses tramped fetlock deep in blood. The Crusaders shouted hosannas and slew like blood-mad tigers and the mangled bodies of the faithful choked the streets.

In a blind red whirl and chaos of destruction and delirium, I found myself slashing vainly against giants who seemed built of solid iron. Slipping in the filth of a blood-running gutter I hacked blindly in the dust and smoke and then the horsemen rode me down and trampled me. As I staggered up, bloody and dazed, a great bellowing monster of a man strode on foot out of the carnage swinging an iron mace. I had never fought Franks and did not then know the power of the terrible blows they deal in hand-to-hand fighting. In my youth and pride and inexperience I stood my ground and sought to match blows with the Frank, but that whistling mace shivered my sword to bits, shattered my shoulder-bone and dashed me half dead into the blood-stained dust.

Then the giant bestrode me, and as he swung up his mace to dash out my brains, the bitterness of death took me by the throat. For I was young and in one blinding instant I saw again the sweet upland grass and the blue of the desert sky, and the tents of my tribe by the blue Oxus. Aye—life is sweet to the young.

Then out of the whirling smoke came

another—a golden-haired youth of my own age, but taller. His sword was red to the hilt, but his eyes were haunted. He cried out to the great Frank, and though I could not understand, I knew, vaguely, as one knows in a dream, that the youth asked that my life be spared—for his soul was sick with the slaughter. But the giant foamed at the mouth and roared like a beast, as he again raised his mace—and the youth leaped like a panther and thrust his long straight sword through his throat, so the giant fell down and died in the dust beside me.

Then the youth knelt at my side and made to staunch my wounds, speaking to me in halting Arabic. But I mumbled: "This is no place for a Chagatai to die. Set me on a horse and let me go. These walls shut out the sun and the dust of the streets chokes me. Let me die with the wind and the sun in my face."

We were nigh the outer wall and all gates had been shattered. The youth caught one of the riderless horses which raced through the streets, and lifted me into the saddle. And I

'...WHERE THE LION

FEASTS, THERE THE

JACKALS GATHER!'

let the reins lie along the horse's neck and he went from the city as an arrow goes from a bow, for he too was desert-bred and he yearned for the open lands. I rode as a man rides in a dream, clinging to the saddle, and knowing only that the walls and the dust and the blood of the city no longer stifled me, and that I would die in the desert after all, which is the place for a Chagatai to die. And so I rode until all knowledge went from me.

Chapter 2.

Shall the grey wolf slink at the mastiff's heel?

Shall the ties of blood grow weak and dim?—

By smoke and slaughter, by fire and steel,

He is my brother—I ride with him.

Now as I gazed into the clear grey eyes of the Frank, all this came back to me and my heart was glad.

"What!" said he, "are you that one whom I set on a horse and saw ride out of the city gate to die in the desert?"

"I am he—Kosru Malik," said I. "I did not die—we Turks are harder than cats to kill. The good steed, running at random, brought me into an Arab camp and they dressed my wounds and cared for me through the months I lay helpless of my wounds. Aye—I was more than half dead when you lifted me on the Arab horse, and the shrieks and red sights of the butchered city swam before me like a dim nightmare. But I remembered your face and the lion on your shield."

"When I might ride again, I asked men of the Frankish youth who bore the lion-shield and they told me it was Sir Eric de Cogan of that part of Frankistan that is called England, newly come to the East but already a knight. Ten years have passed since that crimson day, Sir Eric. Since then I have had fleeting glances of your shield gleaming like a star in the mist, in the forefront of battle, or glittering on the walls of towns we beseiged, but until now I have not met you face to face."

"And my heart is glad for I would pay you the debt I owe you."

His face was shadowed. "Aye—I remember it all. You are in truth that youth. I was sick—sick—triply sick of blood-shed. The Crusaders went mad once they were within the walls. When I saw you, a lad of my own age, about to be butchered in cold blood by one I knew to be a brute and a vandal, a swine and a desecrator of the Cross he wore, my brain snapped."

"And you slew one of your own race to save a Saracen," said I. "Aye—my blade has drunk deep in Frankish blood since that day, my brother, but I can remember a friend as well as an enemy. Whither do you ride? To seek a vengeance? I will ride with you."

"I ride against your own people, Kosru Malik," he warned.

"My people? Bah! Are Persians my people? The blood of a Kurd is scarcely dry on my scimitar. And I am no Seljuk."

"Aye," he agreed, "I have heard that you are a Chagatai."

"Aye, so," said I. "By the beard of the Prophet, on whom peace, Tashkena and Samarand and Khiva and Bokhara are more to me than Trebizond and Shiraz and Antioch. You let blood of your breed to succor me—am I a dog that I should shirk my obligations? Nay, brother, I ride with thee!"

"Then turn your steed on the track you have come and let us be on," he said, as one who is consumed with wild impatience. "I will tell you the whole tale, and a foul tale it is and one which I shame to tell, for the disgrace it puts on a man who wears the Cross of Holy Crusade."

"Know then, that in Edessa dwells one William de Brose, Seneschal to the Count of Edessa. To him lately has come from France his young niece Ettaire. Now harken, Kosru Malik, to the tale of man's unspeakable infamy! The girl vanished and her uncle would give me no answer as to her whereabouts. In desperation I sought to gain entrance to his castle, which lies in the disputed land beyond Edessa's southeastern border, but was apprehended by a man-at-arms close in the council of de Brose. To this man I gave a death

wound, and as he died, fearful of damnation, he gasped out the whole vile plot.

"William de Brose plots to wrest Edessa from his lord and to this end has received secret envoys from Muhammad Khan, sultan of Kizilshehr. The Persian has promised to come to the aid of the rebels when the time comes. Edessa will become part of the Kizilshehr sultanate and de Brose will rule there as a sort of satrap.

"Doubtless each plans to trick the other eventually—Muhammad demanded from de Brose a sign of good faith. And de Brose, the beast unspeakable, as a token of good will sends Ettaire to the sultan!"

Sir Eric's iron hand was knotted in his horse's mane and his eyes gleamed like a aroused tiger's.

"Such was the dying soldier's tale," he continued. "Already Ettaire had been sent away with an escort of Seljuks—with whom de Brose intrigues as well. Since I learned this I have ridden hard—by the saints, you would swear I lied were I to tell you how swiftly I have covered the long weary miles between this spot and Edessa! Days and nights have merged into one dim maze, so I hardly remember myself how I have fed myself and my steed, how or when I have snatched brief moments of sleep, or how I have eluded or fought my way through hostile lands. This steed I took from a wandering Arab when my own fell from exhaustion—surely Ettaire and her captors cannot be far ahead of me."

I told him of the caravan I had seen in the night and he cried out with fierce eagerness but I caught his rein. "Wait, my brother," I said, "your steed is exhausted. Besides now the maid is already with Muhammad Khan."

Sir Eric groaned.

"But how can that be? Surely they cannot yet have reached Kizilshehr."

"They will come to Muhammad ere they come to Kizilshehr," I answered. "The sultan is out with his hawks and they are camped on the road to the city. I was in their camp last night."

Sir Eric's eyes were grim. "Then all the more reason for haste. Ettaire shall not bide in the clutches of the paynim while I live—"

"Wait!" I repeated. "Muhammad Khan will not harm her. He may keep her in the camp with him, or he may send her on to Kizilshehr. But for the time being she is safe. Muhammad is out on sterner business than love-making. Have you wondered why he is encamped with his slayers?"

Sir Eric shook his head.

"I supposed the Kharezmians were moving against him."

"Nay, since Muhammad tore Kizilshehr from the empire, the Shah has not dared attack him, for he has turned Sunnite and claims protection of the Caliphate. And for this reason many Seljuks and Kurds flock to him. He has high ambitions. He sees himself the Lion of Islam. And this is but the beginning. He may yet revive the powers of Islam with himself at the head.

"But now he waits the coming of Ali bin Sulieman, who has ridden up from Araby with five hundred desert hawks and swept a raid far into the borders of the sultanate. Ali is a thorn in Muhammad's flesh, but now he

has the Arab in a trap. He has been outlawed by the Caliphs—if he rides to the west their warriors will cut him to pieces. A single rider, like yourself, might get through; not five hundred men. Ali must ride south to gain Arabia—and Muhammad is between with a thousand men, while the Arabs were looting and burning on the borders, the Persians cut in behind them with swift marches.

"Now let me venture to advise you, my brother. Your horse has done all he may, nor will it aid us or the girl to go riding into Muhammad's camp and be cut down. But less than a league yonder lies a village where we can eat and rest our horses. Then when your steed is fit for the road again, we will ride to the Persian camp and steal the girl from under Muhammad's nose."

Sir Eric saw the wisdom of my words, though he chafed fiercely at the delay, as is the manner of Franks, who can endure any hardship but that of waiting and who have learned all things but patience.

But we rode to the village, a squalid, miserable cluster of huts, whose people had been oppressed by so many different conquerors that they no longer knew what blood they were. Seeing the unusual sight of Frank and Saracen riding together, they at once assumed that the two conquering nations had combined to plunder them. Such being the nature of humans, who would think it strange to see wolf and wildcat combine to loot the rabbit's den.

When they realized we were not about to cut their throats they almost died of gratitude and immediately brought us food of their best—and sorry stuff it was—and cared for our steeds as we directed. As we ate we conversed; I had heard much of Sir Eric de Cogan, for his name is known to every man in Outremer, as the Franks call it, whether Caphar or Believer, and the name of Kosru Malik is not smoke for the wind to blow from men's ears. He knew me by reputation though he had never linked the name with the lad he saved from his people when Jerusalem was sacked.

We had no difficulty in understanding each other now, for he spoke Turki like a Seljuk, and I had long learned the speech of the Franks, especially the tongue of those Franks who are called Normans. These are the leaders and the strongest of the Franks—the craftiest, fiercest, and most cruel of all the Nazarenes. Of such was Sir Eric, though he differed from most of them in many ways. When I spoke of this he said it was because he was half Saxon. This people, he said, once ruled the isle of England, that lies west of Frankistan, and the Normans had come from a land called France, and conquered them, as the Seljuks conquered the Arabs, nearly half a century before. They had intermarried with the conquered, said Sir Eric, and he was the son of a Saxon princess and a knight who rode with William the Conqueror, the emir of the Normans.

He told me—and from weariness fell asleep in the telling—of the great battle which the Normans call Senlac and the Saxons Hastings, in which the emir William overcame his foes, and deeply did I wish that I had been there, for there is no fairer sight to me than to see Franks cutting each other's throats.

Chapter 3.

Pent between tiger and wolf,

Only our lives to lose—

The dice will fall as the gods decide,

But who knows what may first betide?

And blind are all of the roads we ride—

Choose, then, my brother, choose!

As the sun dipped westward Sir Eric woke and cursed himself for his sloth; and we mounted and rode at a canter back along the way I had come, and over which the trail of the caravan was still to be seen. We went warily for it was in my mind that Muhammad would have outriders to see that Ali bin Sulieman did not slip past him. And indeed, as dusk began to fall, we saw the last light of day glint on spear tips and steel caps to the north and west, but we went with care and escaped notice. At about midnight we came upon the sight of the Persian camp but it was deserted and the tracks led southeastward.

"Scouts have relayed word by signal smokes that Ali bin Sulieman is riding hard for Araby," said I, "and Muhammad has marched to cut him off. He is keeping well in touch with his foes."

"Why does the Persian ride with only a thousand men?" asked Sir Eric. "Two to one are no great odds against men like the Bedouins."

"To trap the Arab, speed is necessary," said I. "The sultan can shift his thousand riders as easily and swiftly as a chess player moves his piece. He has sent riders to harry Ali and herd him toward the route across which lies Muhammad with his thousand hard-bitten slayers. We have seen, far away, all evening, signal smokes hanging like serpents along the sky-line. Wherever the Arabs ride, men send up smoke, and these smokes are seen by other scouts far away, who likewise send up smoke that may be seen by Muhammad's outriders."

Sir Eric had been searching among the tracks with flint, steel and tinder, and now he announced: "Here is the track of Ettaire's wagon. See—the left hind wheel has been broken at some time and mended with rawhide—the mark in the tracks shows plainly. The stars give light enough to show if a wagon turned off from the rest. Muhammad may keep the girl with him, or he may send her on to his harem at Kizilshehr."

So we rode on swiftly, keeping good watch, and no wagon train turned off. From time to time Sir Eric dismounted and sought with flint and steel until he found the mark of the hide-bound wheel again. So we progressed and just before the darkness that precedes the dawn, we came to the camp of Muhammad Khan which lay in a wide reach of level desert land at the foot of a jagged tangle of bare, gully-torn hills.

At first I thought the thousand of Muhammad had become a mighty host, for many fires blazed on the plain, straggling in a vast half-circle. The warriors were wide awake, many of them, and we could hear them singing and shouting as they feasted and whetted their scimitars and strung their bows. From the darkness that hid us from their eyes, we could make out the bulks of steeds standing

nearby in readiness and many riders went to and fro between the fires for no apparent reason.

"They have Ali bin Sulieman in a trap," I muttered. "All this show is to fool scouts—a man watching from those hills would swear ten thousand warriors camped here. They fear he might try to break through in the night."

"But where are the Arabs?"

I shook my head in doubt. The hills beyond the plain loomed dark and silent. No single gleam betrayed a fire among them. At that point the hills jutted far out into the plains and none could ride down from them without being seen.

"It must be that scouts have reported Ali is riding hither, through the night," said Sir Eric, "and they wait to cut him off. But look! That tent—the only one pitched in camp—is that not Muhammad's? They have not put up the tents of the emirs because they feared a sudden attack. The warriors keep watch or sleep beneath the wagons. And look—that smaller fire which flickers furthest from the hills, somewhat apart from the rest. A wagon stands beside it, and would not the sultan place Ettaire furthest from the direction in which the enemy comes? Let us see to that wagon."

So the first step in the madness was taken. On the western side the plain was broken with many deep ravines. In one of these we left our horses and in the deepening darkness stole forward on foot. Allah willed it that we should not be ridden down by any of the horsemen who constantly patrolled the plain, and presently it came to pass that we lay on our bellies a hundred paces from the wagon, which I now recognized as indeed the one I had passed the night before.

"Remain here," I whispered. "I have a plan. Bide here, and if you hear a sudden outcry or see me attacked, flee, for you can do no good by remaining."

He cursed me beneath his breath as is the custom of Franks when a sensible course is suggested to them, but when I swiftly whispered my plan, he grudgingly agreed to let me try it.

So I crawled away for a few yards, then rose and walked boldly to the wagon. One warrior stood on guard, with shield and drawn scimitar, and I hoped it was one of the Seljuks who had brought the girl, since if it were so, he might not know me, or that my life was forfeit in the camp. But when I approached I saw that though indeed a Turk, he was a warrior of the sultan's own bodyguard. But he had already seen me, so I walked boldly up to him, seeking to keep my face turned from the fire.

"The sultan bids me bring the girl to his tent," I said gruffly, and the Seljuk glared at me uncertainly.

"What talk is this?" he growled. "When her caravan arrived at the camp, the sultan took time only to glance at her, for much was afoot, and word had come of the movements of the Arab dogs. Earlier in the night he had her before him, but sent her away, saying her kisses would taste sweeter after the dry fury of battle. Well meseemeth he is sorely smitten with the infidel hussy, but is it likely he would break the sleep he snatches

now—"

"Would you argue with the royal order?" I asked impatiently. "Do you burn to sit on a stake, or yearn to have your hide flayed from you? Harken and obey!"

But his suspicions were aroused. Just as I thought him about to step back and wake the girl, like a flash he caught my shoulder and swung me around so that the firelight shone full on my face.

"Ha!" he barked like a jackal. "Kosru Malik—!"

His blade was already glittering above my head. I caught his arm with my left hand and his throat with my right, strangling the yell in his gullet. We plunged to earth together, and wrestled and tore like a pair of peasants, and his eyes were starting from his head, when he drove his knee into my groin. The sudden pain made me relax my grip for an instant, and he ripped his sword-arm free and the blade shot for my throat like a gleam of light. But in that instant there was a sound like an axe driven deep into a tree-trunk, the Seljuk's whole frame jerked convulsively, blood and brains spattered in my face and the scimitar fell harmlessly on my mailed chest. Sir Eric had come up while we fought and seeing my peril, split the warrior's skull with a single blow of his long straight sword.

I rose, drawing my scimitar and looked about; the warriors still revelled by the fires a bow-shot away; seemingly no one had heard or seen that short fierce fight in the shadow of the wagon.

"Swift! The girl, Sir Eric!" I hissed, and stepping quickly to the wagon he drew aside the curtain and said softly: "Ettaire!"

She had been awakened by the struggle and I heard a low cry of joy and love as two white arms went about Sir Eric's mailed neck and over his shoulder I saw the face of the girl I had passed on the road to Edessa.

They whispered swiftly to one another and then he lifted her out and set her gently down. Allah—little more than a child she was, as I could see by the firelight—slim and frail, with deep eyes, grey like Sir Eric's, but soft instead of cold and steely. Comely enough, though a trifle slight to my way of thinking. When she saw the firelight on my dark face and drawn scimitar she cried out sharply and shrank back against Sir Eric, but he soothed her.

"Be not afraid," said he. "This is our good friend, Kosru Malik, the Chagatai. Let us go swiftly; any moment the sentries may ride past this fire."

Her slippers were soft and she was but little used to treading the desert. Sir Eric bore her like a child in his mighty arms as we stole back to the ravine where we had left the horses. It was the will of Allah that we reached them without mishap, but even as we rode up out of the ravine, the Frank holding Ettaire before him, we heard the rattle of hoofs hard by.

"Ride for the hills," muttered Sir Eric. "There is a large band of riders close at our heels, doubtless reinforcements. If we turn back we will ride into them. Perchance we can reach the hills before dawn breaks, then we can turn back the way we wish to go."

So we thundered out on the plain in the

last darkness before dawn, made still darker by a thick, clammy fog, with the tramp of hoofs and the jingle of armor and reins close at our heels. I did not think they were reinforcements but a band of scouts, since they did not turn into the fires but made straight out across the levels toward the hills, driving us before them, though they knew it not. Surely, I thought, Muhammad knows that hostile eyes are on him, hence this milling to and fro of riders to give an impression of great numbers.

The hoofs dwindled behind us as the scouts turned aside or rode back to the lines. The plain was alive with small groups of horsemen who rode to and fro like ghosts in the deep darkness. On each side we heard the stamp of their horses and the rattle of their arms. Tenseness gripped us. Already there was a hint of dawn in the sky, though the heavy fog veiled all. In the darkness the riders mistook us for their comrades, so far, but quickly the early light would betray us.

Once a band of horsemen swung close and hailed us; I answered quickly in Turki and they reined away, satisfied. There were many Seljuks in Muhammad's army, yet had they come a pace closer they would have made out Sir Eric's stature and Frankish apparel. As it was the darkness and the mists clumped all objects into shadowy masses, for the stars were dimmed and the sun was not yet.

Then the noises were all behind us, the mists thinned in light that flowed suddenly across the hills in a white tide, stars vanished and the vague shadows about us took the forms of ravines, boulders, and cactus. Then it was full dawn but we were among the defiles, out of sight of the plains, which were still veiled in the mists that had forsaken the higher levels.

Sir Eric tilted up the white face of the girl and kissed her tenderly.

"Ettaire," said he, "we are encompassed by foes, but now my heart is light."

"And mine, my lord!" she answered, clinging to him. "I knew you would come! Oh, Eric, did the pagan lord speak truth when he said mine own uncle gave me into slavery?"

"I fear so, little Ettaire," said he gently. "His heart is blacker than night."

"What was Muhammad's word to you?" I broke in.

"When I first was taken to him, upon reaching the Mosem camp," she answered, "there was much confusion and haste, for the infidels were breaking camp and preparing to march. The sultan looked on me and spake kindly to me, bidding me not fear. When I begged to be sent back to my uncle, he told me I was a gift from my uncle. Then he gave orders that I be given tender care and rode on with his generals. I was put back in the wagon and thereafter stayed there, sleeping a little, until early last night when I was again taken to the sultan. He talked with me a space and offered me no indignity, though his talk frightened me. For his eyes glowed fiercely on me, and he swore he would make me his queen—that he would build a pyramid of skulls in my honor and fling the turbans of shahs and caliphs at my feet. But he sent me back to my wagon, saying that when he next came to me, he would bring

the head of Ali bin Sulieman for a bridal gift."

"I like it not," said I uneasily. "This is madness—the talk of a Tatar chief rather than that of a civilized Moslem ruler. If Muhammad has been fired with love for you, he will move all Hell to take you."

"Nay," said Sir Eric. "I . . ."

And at that moment a half score of ragged figures leaped from the rocks and seized our reins. Ettaire screamed and I made to draw my scimitar; it is not meet that a dog of the Bedouin seize thus the rein of a son of Turan. But Sir Eric caught my arm. His own sword was in its sheath, but he made no move to draw it, speaking instead in sonorous Arabic, as a man speaks who expects to be obeyed: "We are well met, children of the tents; lead us therefore, to Ali bin Sulieman whom we seek."

At this the Arabs were taken somewhat aback and they gazed at each other.

"Cut them down," growled one. "They are Muhammad's spies."

"Aye," gibed Sir Eric, "spies ever carry their women-folk with them. Fools! We have ridden hard to find Ali bin Sulieman. If you hinder us, your hides will answer. Lead us to your chief."

"Aye," snarled one they called Yurzed, who seemed to be a sort of beg or lesser chief among them. "Ali bin Sulieman knows how to deal with spies. We will take you to him, as sheep are taken to the butcher. Give up thy swords, sons of evil!"

Sir Eric nodded to my glance, drawing his own long blade and delivering it hilt first.

"Even this was to come to pass," said I bitterly. "Lo, I eat dust—take my hilt, dog—would it was the point I was passing through thy ribs."

Yurzed grinned like a wolf. "Be at ease, Turk—time thy steel learnt the feel of a man's hand."

"Handle it carefully," I snarled. "I swear, when it comes back into my hands I will bathe it in swine's blood to cleanse it of the pollution of thy filthy fingers."

I thought the veins in his forehead would burst with fury, but with a howl of rage, he turned his back on us, and we perforce followed him, with his ragged wolves holding tight to our reins.

I saw Sir Eric's plan, though we dared not speak to each other. There was no doubt but that the hills swarmed with Bedouins. To seek to hack our way through them were madness. If we joined forces with them, we had a chance to live, scant though it was. If not—well, these dogs love a Turk little and a Frank none.

On all sides we caught glimpses of hairy men in dirty garments, watching us from behind rocks or from among ravines, with hard, hawk-like eyes; and presently we came to a sort of natural basin where some five hundred splendid Arab steed sought the scanty grass that straggled there. My very mouth watered. By Allah, these Bedouin be dogs and sons of dogs, but they breed good horseflesh!

A hundred or so warriors watched the horses—tall, lean men, hard as the desert that bred them, with steel caps, round bucklers, mail shirts, long sabers and lances. No sign of fire was seen and the men looked worn and

evil as with hunger and hard riding. Little loot had they of that raid! Somewhat apart from them on a sort of knoll sat a group of older warriors and there our captors led us.

Ali bin Sulieman we knew at once; like all his race he was tall and wide-shouldered, tall as Sir Eric but lacking the Frank's massive-ness, built with the savage economy of a desert wolf. His eyes were piercing and menacing, his face lean and cruel. Sir Eric did not wait for him to speak: "Ali bin Sulieman," said the Frank, "we have brought you two good swords."

Ali bin Sulieman snarled as if Sir Eric had suggested cutting his throat.

"What is this?" he snapped, and Yurzed spake, saying: "These Franks and this dog of a Turk we found in the fringe of the hills, just at the lifting of dawn. They came from toward the Persian camp. Be on you guard, Ali bin Sulieman; Franks are crafty in speech, and this Turk is no Seljuk, meseemeth, but some devil from the East."

"Aye," Ali grinned ferociously, "we have notables among us! The Turk is Kosru Malik

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the Chagatai, whose trail the ravens follow. And unless I am mad, that shield is the shield of Sir Eric de Cogan."

"Trust them not," urged Yurzed. "Let us throw their heads to the Persian dogs."

Sir Eric laughed and his eyes grew cold and hard as is the manner of Franks when they stare into the naked face of Doom.

"Many shall die first, though our swords be taken from us," quoth he, "and chief of the desert, ye have no men to waste. Soon ye will need all the swords ye have and they may not suffice. You are in a trap."

Ali tugged at his beard and his eyes were evil and hard.

"If ye be a true man, tell me whose host is that upon the plain."

"That is the army of Muhammad Khan, sultan of Kizilshehr."

Those about Ali cried out mockingly and angrily and Ali cursed.

"You lie! Muhammad's wolves have harried us for a day and a night. They have hung at our flanks like jackals dogging a wounded stag. At dusk we turned on them and scat-

tered them; then when we rode into the hills, lo, on the other side we saw a great host encamped. How can that be Muhammad?"

"Those who harried you were no more than outriders," replied Sir Eric. "light cavalry sent by Muhammad to hang on your flanks and herd you into his trap like so many cattle. The country is up behind you; you cannot turn back. Nay, the only way is through the Persian ranks."

"Aye, so," said Ali with bitter irony. "Now I know you speak like a friend; shall five hundred men cut their way through ten thousand?"

Sir Eric laughed. "The mists of morning still veil yon plain. Let them rise and you will see no more than a thousand men."

"He lies," broke in Yurzed, for whom I was beginning to cherish a hearty dislike. "all night the plain was full of the tramp of horsemen and we saw the blaze of a hundred fires."

"To trick you," said Sir Eric, "to make you believe you looked on a great army. The horsemen rode the plain, partly to create the impression of vast numbers, partly to prevent scouts from slipping too close to the fires. You have to deal with a master at strategems. When did you come into these hills?"

"Sometime after dark, last night," said Ali.

"And Muhammad arrived at dusk. Did you not see the signal smokes behind and about you as you rode? They were lighted by scouts to reveal to Muhammad your movements. He timed his march perfectly and arrived in time to build his fires and catch you in his trap. You might have ridden through them last night, and many escaped. Now you must fight by daylight and I have no doubt but that more Persians are riding this way. See, the mist clears; come with me to yon eminence and I will show you I speak truth."

The mist indeed had cleared from the plain, and Ali cursed as he looked down on the wide flung camp of the Persians, who were beginning to tighten cinch and armor strap, and see to their weapons, judging from the turmoil in camp.

"Trapped and tricked," he cursed. "And my own men growl behind my back. There is no water nor much grass in these hills. So close those cursed Kurds pressed us, that we, who thought them the vanguard of Muhammad's army, have had no time to rest or eat for a day and a night. We have not even built fires for lack of aught to cook. What of the five hundred outriders we scattered at dusk, Sir Eric? They fled at the first charge, the crafty dogs."

"No doubt they have reformed and lurk somewhere in your rear," said Sir Eric. "Best that we mount and strike the Persians swiftly, before the heat of the growing day weakens your hungry men. If those Kurds come in behind us, we are caught in the nutcracker."

Ali nodded and gnawed his beard, as one lost in deep thought. Suddenly he spake: "Why do you tell me this? Why join yourselves to the weaker side? What guile brought you into my camp?"

Sir Eric shrugged his shoulders. "We were fleeing Muhammad. This girl is my betrothed, whom one of his emirs stole from me. If

they catch us, our lives are forfeit."

Thus he spake, not daring to divulge the fact that it was Muhammad himself who desired the girl, nor that she was the niece of William de Brose, lest Ali buy peace from the Persian by handing us over to him.

The Arab nodded absently, but he seemed well pleased. "Give them back their swords," said he. "I have heard that Sir Eric de Cogan keeps his word. We will take the Turk on trust."

So Yurzed reluctantly gave us back our blades. Sir Eric's weapon was a true Crusader's sword—long, heavy and double-edged, with a wide cross guard. Mine was a scimitar forged beyond the Oxus—the hilt set in jewels, the blade of fine blue steel of goodly length, not too curved for thrusting nor too straight for slashing, not too heavy for swift and cunning work yet not too light for mighty blows.

Sir Eric drew the girl aside and said softly: "Ettaire, God knows what is best. It may be that you and I and Kosru Malik die here. We must fight the Persians and God alone knows what the outcome may be. But any other course had cut our throats."

"Come what may, my dear lord," said she with her soul shining in her eyes, "if it find me by your side, I am content."

"What manner of warriors are these Bedouin, my brother?" asked Sir Eric.

"They are fierce fighters," I answered. "But they will not stand. One of them in single combat is a match for a Turk and more than a match for a Kurd or a Persian, but the melee of a serried field is another matter. They will charge like a blinding blast from the desert and if the Persians break and the smell of victory touches the Arabs' nostrils, they will be irresistible. But if Muhammad holds firm and withstands their first onslaught, then you and I had better break away and ride, for these men are hawks who give over if they miss their prey at the first swoop."

"But will the Persians stand?" asked Sir Eric.

"My brother," said I, "I have no love for these Irani. They are called cowards, sometimes; but a Persian will fight like a blood-maddened devil when he trusts his leader. Too many false chiefs have disgraced the ranks of Persia. Who wishes to die for a sultan who betrays his men? The Persians will stand; they trust Muhammad and there are many Turks and Kurds to stiffen the ranks. We must strike them hard and shear straight through."

The hawks were gathering from the hills, assembling in the basin and saddling their steeds. Ali bin Sulieman came striding over to where we sat and stood glowering down at us. "What thing do ye discuss amongst yourselves?"

Sir Eric rose, meeting the Arab eye to eye. "This girl is my betrothed, stolen from me by Muhammad's men, and stolen back again by me, as I told you. Now I am hard put to find a place of safety for her. We cannot leave her in the hills; we cannot take her with us when we ride down into the plains."

Ali looked at the girl as if he had seen her for the first time, and I saw lust for her born in his eyes. Aye, her white face was a spark

to fire men's hearts.

"Dress her as a boy," he suggested. "I will put a warrior to guard her, and give her a horse. When we charge, she shall ride in the rear ranks, falling behind. When we engage the Irani, let her ride like the wind and circle the Persian camp if she may, and flee southward—toward Araby. If she is swift and bold she may win free, and her guard will cut down any stragglers who may seek to stop her. But with the whole Iranian host engaged with us, it is not likely that two horsemen fleeing the battle will be noticed."

Ettaire turned white when this was explained to her, and Sir Eric shuddered. It was indeed a desperate chance, but the only one. Sir Eric asked that I be allowed to be her guard, but Ali answered that he could spare another man better—doubtless he distrusted me, even if he trusted Sir Eric, and feared I might steal the girl for myself. He would agree to naught else, but that we both ride at his side, and we could but agree. As for me, I was glad; I, a hawk of the Chagatai, to be a woman's watch-dog when a battle was forward! A youth named Yussef was detailed for the duty and Ali gave the girl a fine black mare. Clad in Arabian garments, she did in sooth look like a slim young Arab, and Ali's eyes burned as he looked on her. I knew that did we break through the Persians, we would still have the Arab to fight if we kept the girl.

The Bedouins were mounted and restless. Sir Eric kissed Ettaire, who wept and clung to him, then he saw that she was placed well behind the last rank, with Yussef at her side, and he and I took our places beside Ali bin Sulieman. We trotted swiftly through the ravines and debouched upon the broken hill-sides.

There is no God but God! With the early morning sun blazing on the eastern hills we thundered down the defiles and swept out on to the plain where the Persian army had just formed. By Allah, I will remember that charge when I lie dying! We rode like men who ride to feast with Death, with our blades in hands and the wind in our teeth and the reins flying free.

And like a blast from Hell we smote the Persian ranks which reeled to the shock. Our howling fiends slashed and hacked like madmen and the Kizilshehri went down before them like garnered grain. Their saber-play was too swift and desperate for the eye to follow—like the flickering of summer lightning. I swear that a hundred Persians died in the instant of impact when the lines met and our flying squadron hacked straight into the heart of the Persian host. There the ranks stiffened and held, though sorely beset, and the clash of steel rose to the skies. We had lost sight of Ettaire and there was no time to look for her; her fate lay in the lap of Allah.

I saw Muhammad sitting his great white stallion in the midst of his emirs as coolly as if he watched a parade—yet the flickering blades of our screaming devils were a scant spear-cast from him. His lords thronged about him—Kai Kedra, the Seljuk, Abdullah Bey, Mirza Khan, Dost Said, Mechemet Atabeg, Ahmed El Ghor, himself and Arab, and Yar Akbar, a hairy giant of a renegade Afghan, accounted the strongest man in Kizilshehr.

Sir Eric and I hewed our way through the lines, shoulder to shoulder, and I swear by the Prophet, we left only empty saddles behind us. Aye, our steeds' hoofs trod headless corpses! Yet somehow Ali bin Sulieman won through to the emirs before us. Yurzed was close at his heels, but Mirza Khan cut off his head with a single stroke and the emirs closed about Ali bin Sulieman who yelled like a blood-mad panther and stood up in his stirrups, smiting like a madman.

Three Persian men-at-arms he slew, and he dealt Mirza Khan such a blow that it stunned and unhorsed him, though his helmet saved the Persian's brain. Abdullah Bey reined in from behind and thrust his scimitar point through the Arab's mail and deep into his back, and Ali reeled, but ceased not to ply his long saber.

By this time Sir Eric and I had hacked a way to his side. Sir Eric rose in his saddle and shouting the Frankish war-cry, dealt Abdullah Bey such a stroke that helmet and skull shattered together and the emir went headlong from his saddle. Ali bin Sulieman laughed fiercely and though at this instant Dost Said hewed through mail-shirt and shoulder-bone, he spurred his steed headlong into the press. The great horse screamed and reared, and leaning downward, Ali sheared through the neck cords of Dost Said, and lunged at Muhammad Khan through the melee. But he overreached as he struck and Kai Kedra gave him his death stroke.

A great cry went up from the hosts, Arabs and Persians, who had seen the deed, and I felt the whole Arabian line give and slacken. I thought it was because Ali bin Sulieman had fallen, but then I heard a great shouting on the flanks and above the din of carnage, the drum of galloping hoofs. Mechemet Atabeg was pressing me close and I had no time to snatch a glance. But I felt the Arab lines melting and crumbling away, and mad to see what was forward, I took a desperate chance, matching my quickness against the quickness of Mechemet Atabeg and killed him. Then I chanced a swift look. From the north, down from the hills we had just quitted thundered a squadron of hawk-faced men—the Kurds that had been following the Roualli.

At that sight the Arabs broke and scattered like a flight of birds. It was every man for himself and the Persians cut them down as they ran. In a trice the battle changed from a close-locked struggle to a loose maze of flight and single combats that steamed out over the plain. Our charge had carried Sir Eric and I deep into the heart of the Persian host. Now when the Kizilshehrians broke away to pursue their foes, it left but a thin line between us and the open desert to the south.

We struck in the spurs and burst through. Far ahead of us we saw two horsemen riding hard, and one rode the tall black mare the Arabs had given Ettaire. She and her guard had won through, but the plain was alive with horsemen who flew and horsemen who pursued.

We fled after Ettaire and as we swept past the group that guarded Muhammad Khan, we came so close that I saw the boldness and fearlessness of his brown eyes. Aye—there I looked on the face of a born king.

Men opposed us and men pursued us, but they who followed were left behind and they who barred our way died. Nay, the slayers soon turned to easier prey—the flying Arabs.

So we passed over the battle-strewn plain and we saw Ettaire rein in her mount and gaze back toward the field of battle, while Yussef strove to urge her on. But she must have seen us, for she threw up her arm—and then a band of Kurds swept down on them from the side—camp-followers, jackals who followed Muhammad for loot. We heard a scream and saw the swift flicker of steel, and Sir Eric groaned and howled his steed until it screamed and leaped madly ahead of my bay, and we swept up on the struggling group.

The Arab Yussef had wrought well; from one Kurd had he struck off the left arm at the shoulder, and he had broken his scimitar in the breast of another. Now as we rode up his horse went down, but as he fell, the Arab dragged a Kurd out of the saddle and rolling about on the ground, they butchered each other with their curved daggers.

The other Kurds, by some chance, had pulled Ettaire down, instead of slashing off her head, thinking her to be a boy. Now as they tore her garments and exposed her face in their roughness, they saw she was a girl and fair, and they howled like wolves. And as they howled, we smote them.

By the Prophet, a madness was over Sir Eric; his eyes blazed terribly from a face white as death, and his strength was beyond that of mortal man. Three Kurds he slew with three blows and the rest cried out and gave way, screaming that a devil was among them. And in fleeing one passed too near me and I cut off his head to teach him manners.

And now Sir Eric was off his horse and had gathered the terrified girl in his arms, while I looked to Yussef and the Kurd and found them both dead. And I discovered another thing—I had a lance thrust in my thigh, and how or when I received it, I know not for the fire of battle makes men insensible to wounds. I staunched the blood and bound it up as best I could with strips torn from my garments.

"Haste in the name of Allah!" said I to Sir Eric with some irritation, as it seemed he would fondle the girl and whisper pet names to her all morning. "We may be set upon any moment. Set the woman on her horse and let us begone. Save your love-making for a more opportune time."

"Kosru Malik," said Sir Eric, as he did as I advised, "you are a firm friend and a mighty fighter, but have you ever loved?"

"A thousand times," said I, "I have been true to half the women in Samarcand. Mount, in God's name, and let us ride!"

Chapter 4.

*"I gasped, 'A kingdom waits my lord,
her love is but her own,
'A day shall mar, a day shall cure for
her, but what of thee?
'Cut loose the girl—he follows fast—cut
loose and ride alone!'*

*Then Scindhia 'twixt his blistered lips:
'My queens' queen shall she be!'*

—Kipling

And so we rode out of that shambles to avoid any stray bands of pillagers—for all the countryside rises when a battle is fought and they care not whom they rob—we rode south and a little east, intending to swing back toward westward when we had put a goodly number of leagues between us and the victorious Kizilshehri.

We rode until past the noon hour when we found a spring and halted there to rest the horses and to drink. A little grass grew there but of food for ourselves we had none and neither Sir Eric nor I had eaten since the day before, nor slept in two nights. But we dared not sleep with the hawks of war on the wing and none too far away, though Sir Eric made the girl lie down in the shade of a straggling tamarisk and snatch a small nap.

An hour's rest and we rode on again, slowly, to save the horses. Again, as the sun slanted westward we paused awhile in the shade of some huge rocks and rested again, and this time Sir Eric and I took turns at sleeping, and though neither of us slept over half an hour, it refreshed us marvellously. Again we took up the trail, swinging in a wide arc to westward.

It was almost nightfall when I began to realize the madness that had fallen on Muhammad Khan. There came to me the strange restless feeling all desert-bred men know—the sensation of pursuit. Dismounting I laid my ear to the ground. Aye, many horsemen were riding hard, though still far away. I told Sir Eric and we hastened our pace, thinking it perhaps a band of fleeing Arabs.

We swung back to the east again, to avoid them, but when dusk had fallen, I listened to the ground again and again caught the faint vibration of many hoofs.

"Many riders," I muttered. "By Allah, Sir Eric, we are being hunted."

"Is it us they pursue?" asked Sir Eric.

"Who else?" I made answer. "They follow our trail as hunting-dogs follow a wounded wolf. Sir Eric, Muhammad is mad. He lusts after the maid, fool that he is, to thus risk throwing away an empire for a puling girl-child. Sir Eric, women are more plentiful than sparrows, but warriors like thyself are few. Let Muhammad have the girl. 'Twere no disgrace—a whole army hunts us."

His jaw set like iron and he said only: "Ride away and save thyself."

"By the blood of Allah," said I softly, "None but thou could use those words to me and live."

He shook his head. "I meant no insult by them, my brother; no need for thou, too, to die."

"Spur up the horses, in God's name," I said wearily. "All Franks are mad."

And so we rode on through the gathering twilight, into the light of the stars, and all the while far behind us vibrated the faint but steady drum of many hoofs. Muhammad had settled to a steady grinding gait, I believed, and I knew he would gain slowly on us for his steeds were the less weary. How he learned of our flight, I never knew. Perhaps the Kurds who escaped Sir Eric's fury brought him

word of us; perhaps a tortured Arab told him.

Thinking to elude him, we swung far to the east and just before dawn I no longer caught the vibration of the hoofs. But I knew our respite was short; he had lost our trail but he had Kurds in his ranks who could track a wolf across bare rocks. Muhammad would have us ere another sun set.

At dawn we topped a rise and saw before us, spreading to the sky-line, the calm waters of the Green Sea—the Persian Gulf. Our steeds were done; they staggered and tossed their heads, legs wide braced. In the light of dawn I saw my comrades' drawn and haggard faces. The girl's eyes were shadowed and she reeled with weariness though she spoke no word of complaint. As for me, with a single half-hour's sleep for three nights, all seemed dim and like a dream at times till I shook myself into wakefulness. But Sir Eric was iron, brain and spirit and body. An inner fire drove him and spurred him on, and his soul blazed so brightly that it overcame the weakness and weariness of his body. Aye, but it is a hard road, the road of Azrael!

We came upon the shores of the sea, leading our stumbling mounts. On the Arab side the shores of the Green Sea are level and sandy, but on the Persian side they are high and rocky. Many broken boulders lined the steep shores so that the steeds had much ado to pick their way among them.

Sir Eric found a nook between two great boulders and bade the girl sleep a little, while I remained by her to keep watch. He himself would go along the shore and see if he might find a fisher's boat, for it was his intention that we should go out on the face of the sea in an effort to escape the Persians. He strode away along the rocks, straight and tall and very gallant in appearance, with the early light glinting on his armor.

The girl slept the sleep of utter exhaustion and I sat nearby with my scimitar across my knees, and pondered the madness of Franks and sultans. My leg was sore and stiff from the spear thrust, I was athirst and dizzy for sleep and from hunger, and saw naught but death for all ahead.

At last I found myself sinking into slumber in spite of myself, so, the girl being fast asleep, I rose and limped about, that the pain of my wound might keep me awake. I made my way about a shoulder of the cliff a short distance away—and a strange thing came suddenly to pass.

One moment I was alone among the rocks, the next instant a huge warrior had leaped from behind them. I knew in a flashing instant that he was some sort of a Frank, for his eyes were light and they blazed like a tiger's, and his skin was very white, while from under his helmet flowed flaxen locks. Flaxen, likewise, was his thick beard, and from his helmet branched the horns of a bull so at first glance I thought him some fantastic demon of the wilderness.

All this I perceived in an instant as with a deafening roar, the giant rushed upon me, swinging a heavy, flaring-edge axe in his right hand. I should have leaped aside, smiting as he missed, as I had done against a hundred Franks before. But the fog of half-sleep was on me and my wounded leg was stiff.

I caught his swinging axe on my buckler and my forearm snapped like a twig. The force of that terrific stroke dashed me earthward, but I caught myself on one knee and thrust upward, just as the Frank loomed above me. My scimitar point caught him beneath the beard and rent his jugular; yet even so, staggering drunkenly and spurting blood, he gripped his axe with both hands, and with legs wide braced, heaved the axe high above his head. But life went from him ere he could strike.

Then as I rose, fully awake now from the pain of my broken arm, men came from the rocks on all sides and made a ring of gleaming steel about me. Such men I had never seen. Like him I had slain, they were tall and massive with red or yellow hair and beards and fierce light eyes. But they were not clad in mail from head to foot like the Crusaders. They wore horned helmets and shirts of scale mail which came almost to their knees but left their throats and arms bare, and most of them wore no other armor at all. They held on their left arms heavy kite-shaped shields, and in their right hands wide-edged axes. Many wore heavy golden armlets, and chains of gold about their necks.

Surely such men had never before trod the sands of the East. There stood before them, as a chief stands, a very tall Frank whose hauberk was of silvered scales. His helmet was wrought with rare skill and instead of an axe he bore a long heavy sword in a richly worked sheath. His face was as a man that dreams, but his strange light eyes were wayward as the gleams of the sea.

Beside him stood another, stranger than he; this man was very old, with a wild white beard and white elf locks. Yet his giant frame was unbowed and his thews were as oak and iron. Only one eye he had and it held a strange gleam, scarcely human. Aye, he seemed to reckon little of what went about him, for his lion-like head was lifted and his strange eye stared through and beyond that on which it rested, into the deeps of the world's horizons.

Now I saw that the end of the road was come for me. I flung down my scimitar and folded my arms.

"God gives," said I, and waited for the stroke.

And then there sounded a swift clank of armor and the warriors whirled as Sir Eric burst roughly through the ring and faced them. Thereat a sullen roar went up and they pressed forward. I caught up my scimitar to stand at Sir Eric's back, but the tall Frank in the silvered mail raised his hand and spoke in a strange tongue, whereat all fell silent. Sir Eric answered in his own tongue: "I cannot understand Norse. Can any of you speak English or Norman-French?"

"Aye," answered the tall Frank whose height was half a head more than Sir Eric's. "I am Skel Thorwald's son, of Norway, and these are my wolves. This Saracen has slain one of my carles. Is he your friend?"

"Friend and brother-at-arms," said Sir Eric. "If he slew, he had just reason."

"He sprang on me like a tiger from ambush," said I wearily. "They are your breed, brother. Let them take my head if they will;

blood must pay for blood. Then they will save you and the girl from Muhammad."

"Am I a dog?" growled Sir Eric, and to the warriors he said: "Look at your wolf; think you he struck a blow after his throat was cut? Yet here is Kosru Malik with a broken arm. Your wolf smote first; a man may defend his life."

"Take him then, and go your ways," said Skel Thorwald's son slowly. "We would not take an unfair advantage of the odds, but I like not your pagan."

"Wait!" exclaimed Sir Eric. "I ask your aid! We are hunted by a Moslem lord as wolves hunt deer. He seeks to drag a Christian girl into his harem—"

"Christian!" rumbled Skel Thorwald's son. "But ten days ago I slew a horse to Thor."

I saw a slow desperation grow in Sir Eric's deep-lined face.

"I thought even you Norse had forsaken your pagan gods," said he, "but let it rest—if there be manhood among ye, aid us, not for my sake nor the sake of my friend, but for the sake of the girl who sleeps among those

'SPUR UP THE HORSES,

IN GOD'S NAME.

ALL FRANKS ARE MAD!'

rocks."

At that from among the rest thrust himself a warrior of my height and of mighty build. More than fifty winters he had known, yet his red hair and beard were untouched by grey, and his blue eyes blazed as if a constant rage flamed in his soul.

"Aye!" he snarled. "Aid ye ask, you Norman dog! You, whose breed overran the heritage of my people—whose kinsmen rode fetlock deep in good Saxon blood—now you howl for aid and succor like a trapped jackal in this naked land. I will see you in Hell before I lift axe to defend you or yours."

"Nay, Hrothgar," the ancient white-bearded giant spoke for the first time and his voice was like the call of a deep-throated trumpet. "This knight is alone among we many. Entreat him not harshly."

Hrothgar seemed abashed, angry, yet wishful to please the old one.

"Aye, my king," he muttered half sullenly, half apologetically.

Sir Eric started: "King?"

"Aye!" Hrothgar's eyes blazed anew; in

truth he was a man of constant spleen. "Aye—the monarch your cursed William tricked and trapped, and beat by a trick to cast from his throne. There stands Harold, the son of Godwin, rightful King of England!"

Sir Eric doffed his helmet, staring as if at a ghost.

"But I do not understand," he stammered. "Harold fell at Senlac—Edith Swan-necked found him among the slain—"

Hrothgar snarled like a wounded wolf, while his eyes flamed and flickered with blue lights of hate.

"A trick to cozen tricksters," he snarled. "That was an unknown chief of the west Edith showed to the priests. I, a lad of ten, was among those that bore King Harold from the field by night, senseless and blinded."

His fierce eyes grew gentler and his rough voice strangely soft.

"We bore him beyond the reach of the dog William and for months he lay nigh unto death. But he lived, though the Norman arrow had taken his eye and a sword-slash across the head had left him strange and fey."

Again the lights of fury flickered in the eyes of Hrothgar.

"Forty-three years of wandering and harrying on the Viking's path!" he rasped. "William robbed the king of his kingdom, but not of men who would follow and die for him. See ye these Vikings of Skel Thorwald's son? Northmen, Danes, Saxons who would not bide under the Norman heel—we are Harold's kingdom! And you, you French dog, beg us for aid! Ha!"

"I was born in England—" began Sir Eric.

"Aye," sneered Hrothgar, "under the roof of a castle wrested from some good Saxon thane and given to a Norman thief!"

"But kin of mine fought at Senlac beneath the Golden Dragon as well as on William's side," protested Sir Eric. "On the distaff side I am of the blood of Godric, earl of Wessex—"

"The more shame to you, renegade mongrel," raved the Saxon. "I—"

The swift patter of small feet sounded on the rocks. The girl had wakened, and frightened by the rough voices, had come seeking her lover. She slipped through the mailed ranks and ran into Sir Eric's arms, panting and staring wildly about in terror at the grim slayers. The Northmen fell silent.

Sir Eric turned beseechingly toward them: "You would not let a child of your own breed fall into the hands of the pagans? Muhammad Khan, sultan of Kizilshehr is close on our heels—scarce an hour's ride away. Let us go into your galley and sail away with you—"

"We have no galley," said Skel Thorwald's son. "In the night we ventured too close inshore and a hidden reef ripped the guts out of her. I warned Asgrim Raven that no good would come of sailing out of the broad ocean into this narrow sea, which witches make green fire at night—"

"And what could we, a scant hundred, do against a host?" broke in Hrothgar. "We could not aid you if we would—"

"But you too are in peril," said Sir Eric. "Muhammad will ride you down. He has no love for Franks."

"We will buy our peace by delivering to him, you and the girl and the Turk, bound

hand and foot," replied Hrothgar. "Asgrim Raven cannot be far away; we lost him in the night, but he will be scouring the coast to find us. We had dared not light a signal fire lest the Saracens see it. But now we will buy peace of this Eastern lord—"

"Peace!" Harold's voice was like the deep mellow call of a great golden bell. "Have done, Hrothgar. That was not well said."

He approached Sir Eric and the girl and they would have knelt before him, but he prevented it and lightly laid his corded hand on Etaire's head, tilting gently back her face so that her great pleading eyes looked up at him. And I called on the Prophet beneath my breath for the ancient one seemed unearthly with his great height and the strange mystic gleam of his eye, and his white locks like a cloud about his mailed shoulders.

"Such eyes had Editha," said he softly. "Aye, child, your face bears me back half a century. You shall not fall into the hands of the heathen while the last Saxon king can lift a sword. I have drawn my blade in many a less worthy brawl on the red roads I have walked. I will draw it again, little one."

"This is madness!" cried out Hrothgar. "Shall kites pick the bones of Godwin's son because of a French girl?"

"God's splendor!" thundered the ancient. "Am I king or dog?"

"You are king, my liege," sullenly growled Hrothgar, dropping his eyes. "It is yours to give command—even in madness we follow."

Such is the devotion of savage men!

"Light the beacon-fire, Skel Thorwald's son," said Harold. "We will hold the Moslem hard till the coming of Asgrim Raven, God willing. What are thy names, thine and this warrior of the East?"

Sir Eric told him, and Harold gave orders. And I was amazed to see them obeyed without question. Skel Thorwald's son was chief of these men, but he seemed to grant Harold the due of a veritable monarch—he whose kingdom was lost and dead in the mists of time.

Sir Eric and Harold set my arm, binding it close to my body. Then the Vikings brought food and a barrel of stuff they called ale, which had been washed ashore from the broken ship, and while we watched the signal smoke go up, we ate and drank ravenously. And new vigor entered into Sir Eric. His face was drawn and haggard from lack of sleep and the strain of flight and battle, but his eyes blazed with indomitable light.

"We have scant time to arrange our battle-lines, your majesty," said he, and the old king nodded.

"We cannot meet them in this open place. They would league us on all sides and ride us down. But I noted a very broken space not far from here—"

So we went to this place. A Viking had found a hollow in the rocks where water had gathered, and we gave the weary horses to drink and left them there, drooping in the shade of the cliffs. Sir Eric helped the girl along and would have given me a hand but I shook my head as I limped along. And Hrothgar came and slipped his mighty arm beneath my shoulders and so aided me, for my wounded leg was numb and stiff.

"A mad game, Turk," he growled.

"Aye," I answered as one in a dream. "We be all madmen and ghosts on the Road of Azrael. Many have died for the yellow-haired girl. More will die ere the road is at an end. Much madness have I seen in the days of my life, but never aught to equal this."

Chapter 5.

*We shall not see the hills again where
the grey cloud limns the oak,
We who die in a naked land to succour
an alien folk;
Well—we have followed the Viking-path
with a king to lead us forth—
And scalds will thunder our victories in
the washael halls of the North.
—the Song of Skel Thorwald's son.*

Already the drum of many hoofs was in our ears. We took our stand in a wide cleft of a cliff, with the broken, boulder-strewn beach at our backs. The land in front of us was a ravine-torn waste, over which the horses could not charge. The Franks massed themselves in the wide cleft, shoulder to shoulder, wide shields overlapping. At the tip of this shield-wall stood King Harold with Skel Thorwald's son on one hand and Hrothgar on the other.

Sir Eric had found a sort of ledge in the cliff behind and above the heads of the warriors, and here he placed the girl.

"You must bide with her, Kosru Malik," said he. "Your arm is broken, your leg stiff; you are not fit to stand in the shield-wall."

"God gives," said I, "but my heart is heavy and the tang of bitterness is in my mouth. I had thought to fall beside you, my brother."

"I give her in your trust," said he, and clasping the girl to him, he held her hungrily a moment, then dropped from the ledge and strode away, while she wept and held out her white arms after him.

I drew my scimitar and laid it across my knees. Muhammad might win the fight, but when he came to take the girl he would find only a headless corpse. She would not fall into his hands alive.

Aye, I gazed on that slim white bit of flesh and swore in wonder and amazement that a frail woman could be the death of so many strong men. Verily, the star of Azrael hovers over the birth of a beautiful woman, the King of the Dead laughs aloud and ravens whet their black beaks.

She was brave enough. She ceased her whimpering and made shift to cleanse and rebandage my wounded leg, for which I thanked her. And while so occupied there was a thunder of hoofs and Muhammad Khan was upon us. The riders numbered at least five hundred men, perhaps more, and their horses reeled with weariness. They drew rein at the beginning of the broken ground and gazed curiously at the silent band in the defile. I saw Muhammad Khan, slender, tall, with the heron feathers in his gilded helmet. And I saw Kai Kedra, Mirza Khan, Yar Akbar, Ahmed El Ghor the Arab, and Kojar Khan, the great emir of the Kurds, he who had led the riders who harried the Arabs.

Now Muhammad stood up in his golden stirrups and shading his eyes with his hand,

turned and spoke to his emirs, and I knew he had recognized Sir Eric beside King Harold. Kai Kedra reined his steed forward through the broken gullies as far as it could go, and making a trumpet of his hands, called aloud in the tongue of the Cursaders: "Harken, Franks, Muhammad Khan, sultan of Kizilshahr, has no quarrel with you; but there stands one who has stolen a woman from the sultan; therefore, give her up to us and ye may depart peacefully."

"Tell Muhammad," answered Sir Eric, "that while one Frank lives, he shall not have Etaire de Brose."

So Kai Kedra rode back to Muhammad who sat his horse like a carven image, and the Persians conferred among themselves. And I wondered again. But yesterday Muhammad Khan had fought a fierce battle and destroyed his foes; now he should be riding in triumph down the broad streets of Kizilshahr, with crimson standards flying and golden trumpets blaring, and white-armed women flinging roses before his horse's hoofs; yet here he was, far from his city, and far from the field of battle, with the dust and weariness of hard riding on him, and all for a slender girl-child.

Aye—Muhammad's lust and Sir Eric's love were whirlpools that drew in all about them. Muhammad's warriors followed him because it was his will; King Harold opposed him because of the strangeness in his brain and the mad humor Franks call chivalry; Hrothgar who hated Sir Eric, fought beside him because he loved Harold, as did Skel Thorwald's son and his Vikings. And I, because Sir Eric was my brother-at-arms.

Now we saw the Persians dismounting, for they saw there was no charging on their weary horses over that ground. They came clambering over the gullies and boulders in their gilded armor and feathered helmets, with their silver-chased blades in their hands. Fighting on foot they hated, yet they came on, and the emirs and Muhammad himself with them. Aye, as I saw the sultan striding forward with his men, my heart warmed to him again and I wished that Sir Eric and I were fighting for him, and not against him.

I thought the Franks would assail the Persians as they clamored across the ravines but the Vikings did not move out of their tracks. They made their foes come to them, and the Moslems came with a swift rush across the level space and a shouting of "Allaho akbar!"

That charge broke on the shield-wall as a river breaks on a shoal. Through the howling of the Persians thundered the deep rhythmic shouts of the Vikings and the crashing of the axes drowned the singing and whistling of the scimitars.

The Norsemen were immovable as a rock. After that first rush the Persians fell back, baffled, leaving a crescent of hacked corpses before the feet of the blond giants. Many strung bows and drove their arrows at short range but the Vikings merely bent their heads and the shafts glanced from their horned helmets or shivered on the great shields.

And the Kizilshehrians came on again. Watching above, with the trembling girl beside me, I burned and froze with the desperate splendor of that battle. I gripped my scimitar hilt until blood oozed from beneath

my fingernails. Again and again Muhammad's warriors flung themselves with mad valor against that solid iron wall. And again and again they fell back broken. Dead men were heaped high and over their mangled bodies the living climbed to hack and smite.

Franks fell too, but their comrades trampled them under and closed the ranks again. There was no respite; ever Muhammad urged on his warriors, and ever he fought on foot with them, his emirs at his side. Allahu akbar! There fought a man and a king who was more than a king!

I had thought the Crusaders mighty fighters, but never had I seen such warriors as these, who never tired, whose light eyes blazed with strange madness, and who chanted wild songs as they smote. Aye, they dealt great blows! I saw Skel Thorwald's son hew a Kurd through the hips so the legs fell one way and the torso another. I saw King Harold deal a Turk such a blow that the head flew ten paces from the body. I saw Hrothgar hew off a Persian's leg at the thigh, though the limb was encased in heavy mail.

Yet they were no more terrible in battle than my brother-at-arms, Sir Eric. I swear, his sword was a wind of death and no man could stand before it. His face was lighted strangely and mystically; his arm was thrilled with superhuman strength, and though I sensed a certain kinship between himself and the wild barbarians who chanted and smote beside him, yet a mystic, soul-something set him apart from and beyond them. Aye, the forge of hardship and suffering had burned from soul and brain and body all dross and left only the white hot fire of his inner soul that lifted him to heights unattainable by common men.

On and on the battle raged. Many Moslems had fallen, but many Vikings had died too. The remnant had been slowly hurled back by repeated charges until they were battling on the beach almost beneath the ledge whereon I stood with the girl. There the formation was broken among the boulders and the conflict changed to a straggling series of single conflicts. The Norsemen had taken fearful toll—by Allah, no more than a hundred Persians remained able to lift the sword! And of Franks there were less than a score.

Skel Thorwald's son and Yar Akbar met face to face just as the Viking's notched sword broke in a Moslem's skull. Yar Akbar shouted and swung up his scimitar but ere he could strike, the Viking roared and leaped like a great lion. His iron arms locked about the huge Afghan's body and I swear I heard above the battle, the splintering of Yar Akbar's bones. Then Skel Thorwald's son dashed him down, broken and dead, and catching up an axe from a dying hand, made at Muhammad Khan. Kai Kedra was before him. Even as the Viking struck, the Seljuk drove his scimitar through mail links and ribs and the two fell together.

I saw Sir Eric hard beset and bleeding and I rose and spoke to the girl.

"Allah defend you," said I, "but my brother-at-arms dies alone and I must go and fall beside him."

She had watched the fight white and still as a marble statue.

"Go, in God's name," she said, "and His power nerve your sword-arm—but leave me your dagger."

So I broke my trust for once, and dropping from the ledge, came across the battle-tramped beach, my scimitar in my right hand. As I came I saw Kojar Khan and King Harold at sword strokes, while Hrothgar, beard a-bristle, dealt mighty blows on all sides with his dripping axe. And the Arab, Ahmed El Ghor, ran in from the side and hacked through Harold's mail so the blood flowed over his girdle. Hrothgar cried out like a wild beast and lunged at Ahmed who faltered an instant before the Saxon's terrible eyes. And Hrothgar smote him a blow that sheared through mail like cloth, severed the shoulder and split the breast-bone, and splintered the haft in the Saxon's hand. At almost the same instant King Harold caught Kojar Khan's blade on his left forearm. The edge sheared through a heavy golden armlet and bit to the bone but the ancient king split the Kurd's skull with a single blow.

Sir Eric and Mirza Khan fought while the Persians surged about, seeking to strike a blow that would drop the Frank and yet not touch the emir. And I strode untouched through the battle, stepping over dead and dying men, and so came suddenly face to face with Muhammad Khan.

His lean face was haggard, his fine eyes shadowed, his scimitar red to the hilt. He had no buckler and his mail had been hacked to open rents in many places. He recognized me and slashed at me, and I locked his blade hilt to hilt; leaning my weight upon my weapon, I said to him: "Muhammad Khan, why be a fool? What is a Frankish girl to you, who might be emperor of half the world? Without you Kizilshehr will fall, will crumble to dust. Go your way and leave the girl to my brother-at-arms."

But he only laughed as a madman laughs and tore his scimitar free. He leaped in, striking, and I braced my legs and parried his stroke, and driving my blade beneath his, found a rent in his mail and transfixed him beneath the heart. A moment he stood stiffly, mouth open, then as I freed my point, he slid to the blood-soaked earth and died.

"And thus fade the hopes of Islam and the glory of Kizilshehr," I said bitterly.

A great shout went up from the weary, blood-stained Persians who yet remained and they stood frozen. I looked for Sir Eric; he stood swaying above the still form of Mirza Khan and as I looked he lifted his sword and pointed waveringly out to sea. And all the living looked. A long strange craft was sweeping inshore, low in the waist, high of stern and bows, with a prow carved like a dragon's head. Long oars hurtled her through the calm water and the rowers were blond giants who roared and shouted. And as we saw this, Sir Eric crumpled and fell beside Mirza Khan.

But the Persians had had enough of war. They fled, those who were left to flee, taking with them the senseless Kai Kedra. I went to Sir Eric and loosened his mail, but even as I did so, I was pushed away and the girl Ettaire was sobbing on her lover. I helped her get off his mail and by Allah, it but hung in blood-stained shreds. He had a deep stab

in his thigh, another in his shoulder and most of the mail had been hacked clean away from his arms, which bore many flesh wounds; and a blade had cut through steel cap and coil links, making a wide scalp wound.

But none of the hurts was mortal. He was insensible from weakness—loss of blood and the terrific grind of the previous days. King Harold had been slashed deeply in the arm and across the ribs, and Hrothgar bled from gashes in the face and across chest muscles, and limped from a stroke in the leg. Of the half dozen warriors that still lived, not one but was cut, bruised and gashed. Aye, a strange and grisly crew they made, with rent, crimson mail and notched and blood-stained weapons.

Now as King Harold sought to aid the girl and I in staunching Sir Eric's blood-flow, and Hrothgar cursed because the king would not allow his own wounds to be seen to first, the galley grounded and the warriors thronged the shore. Their chief, a tall, mighty man with long black locks, gazed at the corpse of Skel Thorwald's son and shrugged his shoulders. "Thor's love on a valiant warrior," was all he said. "He will revel in Valhalla this night."

Then the Franks took up Sir Eric and others of the wounded and took them aboard the ship, the girl clinging to his blood-stained hand and having no eyes or thought for any but her lover which is the way of women-kind, and as it should be. King Harold sat on a boulder while they bandaged his wounds and again deep awe came over me to see him so, with his sword across his knees and his white elf locks flying in the rising wind, and his strange aspect, like a grey and ancient king of some immemorial legend.

"Good sir," he said to me, "you cannot abide in this naked land. Come with us."

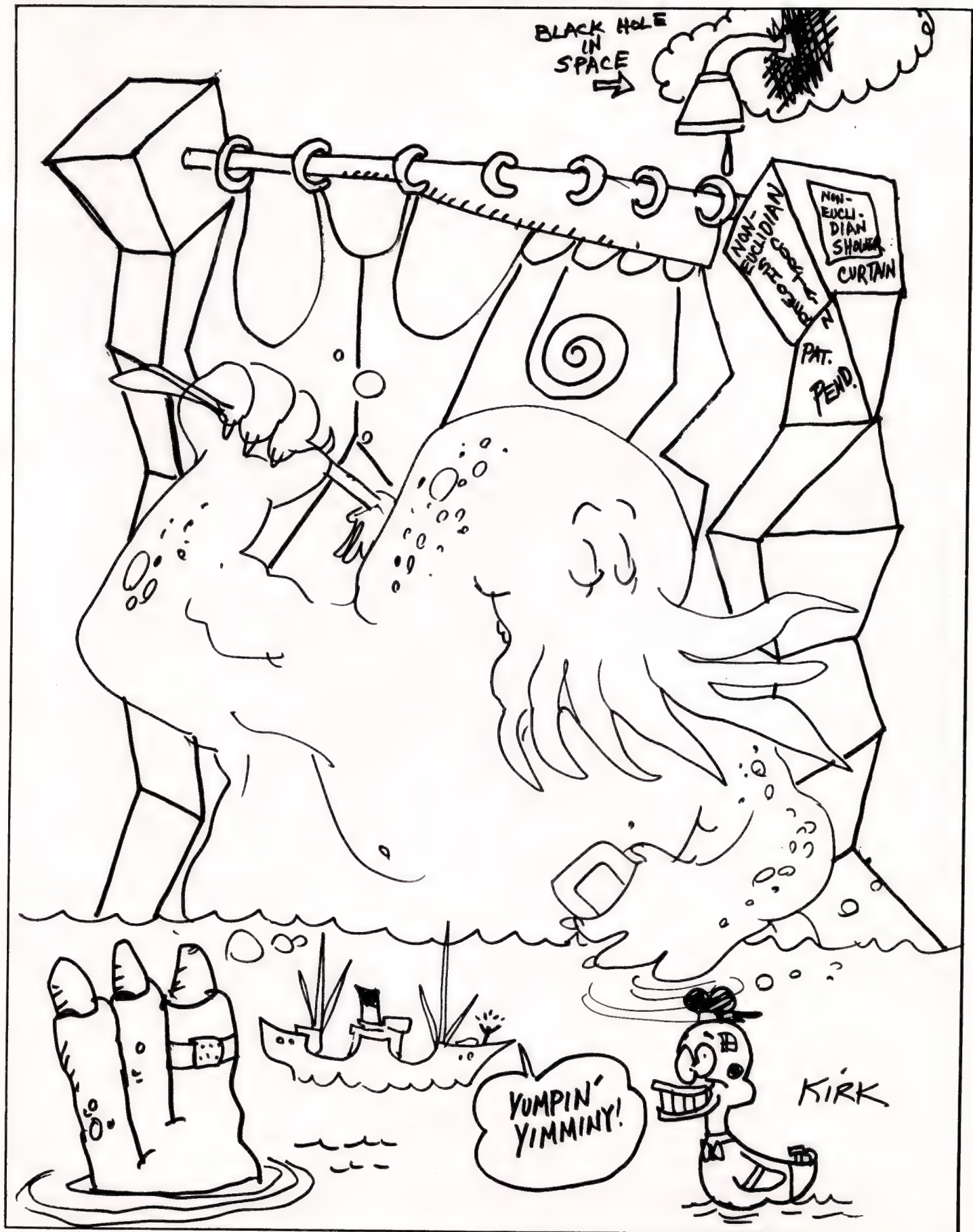
But I shook my head. "Nay, my lord, it may not be. But one thing I ask; let one of your warriors bring to me here the steeds that we left down on the beach. I can walk no more on this wounded leg."

It was done and the horses had so revived that I believed that by slow riding and changing mounts often I could win back out of the wilderness. King Harold hesitated as the rest went aboard: "Come with us, warrior! The sea-road is good for wanderers and landless men. There is quenching of thirst on the grey paths of the winds, and the flying clouds to still the sting of lost dreams. Come!"

"Nay," said I, "the trail of Azrael ends here. I have fought beside kings and seen sultans fall and my mind is dizzy with wonder. Take Sir Eric and the girl and when they tell their sons the tale in that far land beyond the plains of Frankistan, let them sometimes remember Kosru Malik. But I may not come with you. Kizilshehr has fallen on this shore but there be other lords of Islam who have need of my sword. Salaam!"

And so sitting my steed, I saw the ship fade southward, and my eyes made out the ancient king standing like a grey statue on the poop, sword lifted high in salute, until the galley vanished in the blue haze of the distance and solitude brooded over the quiet waves of the sea. □

kirk's corner





IN BREMEN, SOMETHING WALKED THE NIGHT

DER UNTERGANG DES ABENDLANDESMENSCHEN

by HOWARD WALDROP



hey rode through the flickering landscape to the tune of organ music.

Broncho Billy, short like an old sailor, and William S., tall and rangy as a windblown pine. Their faces, their horses, the landscape all darkened and became light; were at first indistinct then sharp and clear as they rode across one ridge and down into the valley beyond.

Ahead of them, in much darker shades, was the city of Bremen, Germany.

Except for organ and piano music, it was quiet in most of Europe.

In the vaults below the Opera, in the City of Lights, Erik the phantom played the *Toccata and Fugue* while the sewers ran blackly by.

In Berlin, Cesare the somnambulist slept. His mentor Caligari lectured at the University, and waited for his chance to send the monster through the streets.

Also in Berlin, Dr. Mabuse was dead and could no longer control the underworld.

But in Bremen. . .

In Bremen, something walked the night.

To the cities of china eggs and dolls, in the time of sawdust bread and the price of six million marks for a postage stamp, came Broncho Billy and William S. They had ridden hard for two days and nights, and the horses were heavily lathered.

They reined in, and tied their mounts to a streetlamp on the Wilhelmstrasse.

"What say we get a drink, William S.?" asked the shorter cowboy. "All this damn

flickering gives me a headache."

William S. struck a pose three feet away from him, turned his head left and right, and stepped up to the doors of the *gasthaus* before them.

With his high-pointed hat and checked shirt, William S. looked like a weatherbeaten scarecrow, or a child's version of Abraham Lincoln before the beard. His eyes were like shiny glass, though which some inner hellfires shown.

Broncho Billy hitched up his pants. He wore Levis, which on him looked too large, a dark vest, lighter shirt, big leather chaps with three tassles at hip, knee and calf. His hat seemed three sizes too big.

Inside the tavern, things were murky grey, black and stark white. And always, the flickering.

They sat down at a table and watched the clientele. Ex-soldiers, in the remnants of uniforms, seven years after the Great War had ended. The unemployed, spending their last few coins on beer. The air was thick with grey smoke from pipes and cheap cigarettes.

Not too many people had noticed the entrance of William S. and Broncho Billy.

Two had.

"Quirt!" said an American captain, his hand on his drinking buddy, a sergeant.

"What?" asked the sergeant, his hand on the barmaid.

"Look who's here!"

The sergeant peered toward the haze of flickering grey smoke where the cowboys sat.

"Damn!" he said.

"Want to go over and chat with 'em?" asked the captain.

"&%*\$(a) no!" cursed the sergeant. "This

ain't our %&*!*\$ing picture."

"I suppose you're right," said the captain, and returned to his wine.

"You must remember, my friend," said William S. after the waiter brought them beer, "that there can be no rest in the pursuit of evil."

"Yeah, but hell, William S., this is a long way from home."

William S. lit a match, put it to a briar pipe containing his favorite shag tobacco. He puffed on it a few moments, then regarded his companion across his tankard.

"My dear Broncho Billy," he said. "No place is too far to go in order to thwart the forces of darkness. This is something Dr. Helioglabulus could not handle by himself, else he should not have summoned us."

"Yeah, but William S., my butt's sore as a rizen after two days in the saddle. I think we should bunk down before we see this doctor fellow."

"Ah, that's where you're wrong, my friend," said the tall, hawknosed cowboy. "Evil never sleeps. Men must."

"Well, I'm a man," said Broncho Billy. "I say, let's sleep."

Just then, Doctor Helioglabulus entered the tavern.

He was dressed as a Tyrolean mountain guide, in *lederhosen* and feathered cap, climbing boots and suspenders. He carried with him an alpenstock, which made a large *clunk* each time it touched the floor.

He walked through the flickering darkness and smoke and stood in front of the table with the two cowboys.

William S. had risen.

"Dr.—" he began.
"Eulenspiegel," said the other, an admonitory finger to his lips.

Broncho Billy rolled his eyes heavenward.

"Dr. Eulenspiegel, I'd like you to meet my associate and chronicler, Mr. Broncho Billy."

The doctor clicked his heels together.

"Have a chair," said Broncho Billy, pushing one out from under the table with his boot. He tipped his hat up off his eyes.

The doctor, in his comic opera outfit, sat.

"Helioglabulus," whispered William S., "whatever are you up to?"

"I had to come incognito. There are . . . others who should not learn of my presence here."

Broncho Billy looked from one to the other and rolled his eyes again.

"Then the game is afoot?" asked William S., his eyes more alight than ever.

"Game such as man has never before seen," said the doctor.

"I see," said William S., his eyes narrowing as he drew on his pipe. "Moriarty?"

"Much more evil."

"More evil?" asked the cowboy, his fingertips pressed together. "I can not imagine such."

"Neither could I, up until a week ago," said Helioglabulus. "Since then, the city has experienced wholesale terrors. Rats run the streets at night, invade houses. This tavern will be deserted by nightfall. The people lock their doors and say prayers, even in this age. They are reverting to the old superstitions."

"They have just cause?" asked William S.

"A week ago, a ship pulled into the pier. On board was—one man!" He paused for dramatic effect. Broncho Billy was unimpressed. The doctor continued. "The crew, the passengers were gone. Only the captain was aboard, lashed to the wheel. And he was—drained of blood!"

Broncho Billy became interested.

"You mean," asked William S., bending over his beer, "that we are dealing with—the undead?"

"I am afraid so," said Dr. Helioglabulus, twisting his mustaches.

"Then we shall need the proper armaments," said the taller cowboy.

"I have them," said the doctor, taking cartridge boxes from his backpack.

"Good!" said William S. "Broncho Billy, you have your revolver?"

"What!? Whatta ya mean, 'do you have your revolver?' Just what do you mean? Have you ever seen me without my guns, William S.? Are you losing your mind?"

"Sorry, Billy," said William S., looking properly abashed.

"Take these," said Helioglabulus.

Broncho Billy broke open his two Peacemakers, dumped the .45 shells on the table. William S. unlimbered his two Navy .36s and pushed the recoil rod down in the cylinders. He punched each cartridge out onto the tabletop.

Billy started to load up his pistols, then took a closer look at the shells; held one up and examined it.

"Goddam, William S.," he yelled. "Wooden bullets! Wooden bullets?"

Helioglabulus was trying to wave him to silence. The tall cowboy tried to put his hand

on the other.

Everyone in the beer hall had heard him. There was a deafening silence, all the patrons turned toward their table.

"Damn," said Broncho Billy. "You can't shoot a wooden bullet fifteen feet and expect it to hit the broad side of a corncrib. What the hell we gonna shoot wooden bullets at?"

The tavern began to empty, people rushing from the place, looking back in terror. All except five men at a far table.

"I am afraid, my dear Broncho Billy," said William S., "that you have frightened the patrons, and warned the evil ones of our presence."

Broncho Billy looked around.

"You mean those guys over there?" he nodded toward the other table. "Hell, William S., we both took on twelve men one time."

Dr. Helioglabulus sighed. "No, no, you don't understand. Those men over there are harmless; crackpot revolutionists. William and I are speaking of *nosferatu*. . ."

Broncho Billy continued to stare at him.

". . . the undead. . ."

No response.

". . . er, ah, vampires. . ."

"You mean," asked Billy, "like Theda Bara?"

"Not vamps, my dear friend," said the hawknosed wrangler. "Vampires. Those who rise from the dead and suck the blood of the living."

"Oh," said Broncho Billy. Then he looked at the cartridges. "These kill 'em?"

"Theoretically," said Helioglabulus.

"Meaning you don't know?"

The doctor nodded.

"In that case," said Broncho Billy, "we go halfies." He began to load his .45s with one regular bullet, then a wooden one, then another standard.

William S. had already filled his with wooden slugs.

"Excellent," said Helioglabulus. "Now, put these over your hatbands. I hope you never have to get close enough for them to be effective."

What he handed them were silver hatbands. Stamped on the shiny surface of the bands was a series of crosses. They slipped them on their heads, settling them on their hatbrims.

"What next?" asked Broncho Billy.

"Why, we wait for nightfall, for the *nosferatu* to strike!" said the doctor.

"Did you hear them, Hermann?" asked Joseph.

"Sure. You think we ought to do the same?"

"Where would we find someone to make wooden bullets for pistols such as ours?" asked Joseph.

The five men sitting at the table looked toward the doctor and the two cowboys. All five were dressed in the remnants of uniforms belonging to the War. The one addressed as Hermann still wore the Knight's Cross on the faded sponder of his dress jacket.

"Martin," said Hermann. "Do you know where we can get wooden bullets?"

"I'm sure we could find someone to make them for the automatics," he answered. "Ernst, go to Wartman's, see about them."

Ernst stood, then slapped the table. "Every time I hear the word vampire, I reach for my Browning!" he said.

They all laughed. Martin, Hermann, Joseph, Ernst most of all. Even Adolf laughed a little.

Soon after dark, someone ran into the place, white of face. "The vampire!" he yelled, pointing vaguely toward the street, and fell out.

Broncho Billy and William S. jumped up. Helioglabulus stopped them. "I'm too old, and will only hold you up," he said. "I shall try to catch up later. Remember. . . the crosses. The bullets in the heart!"

As they rushed out past the other table, Ernst, who had left an hour earlier, returned with two boxes.

"Quick, Joseph!" he said as the two cowboys went through the door. "Follow them! We'll be right behind. Your pistol!"

Joseph turned, threw a Browning automatic pistol back to Hermann, then went out the doors as hoofbeats clattered in the street.

The other four began to load their pistols from the boxes of cartridges.

The two cowboys rode toward the commotion.

"Yee-haw!" yelled Broncho Billy. They galloped down the well-paved streets, their horses' hooves striking sparks from the cobles.

They passed the police and others running towards the sounds of screams and dying. Members of the Free Corps, ex-soldiers and students, swarmed the streets in their uniforms. Torches burned against the flickering black night skies.

The city was trying to overcome the *nosferatu* by force.

Broncho Billy and William S. charged toward the fighting. In the center of a square stood a coach, all covered in black crepe. The driver, a plump, cadaverous man, held the reins to four black horses. The four were rearing high in their traces, their hooves menacing the crowd.

But it was not the horses which kept the mob back.

Crawling out of a second story hotel window was a vision from a nightmare. Bald, with pointed ears, teeth like a rat, beady eyes bright in the flickering night, the vampire climbed from a bedroom to the balcony. The front of his frock coat was covered with blood, its face and arms were smeared. A man's hand stuck halfway out the window, and the curtains were spattered black.

The *nosferatu* jumped to the ground, and the crowd parted as he leaped from the hotel steps to the waiting carriage. Then the driver cracked his whip over the horses—there was no sound—and the team charged, tumbling people like leaves before the night wind.

The carriage seemed to float to the two cowboys who rode after it. There was no sound of hoofbeats ahead, no noise from the harness, no creak of axles. It was as if they followed the wind itself through the night-time streets of Bremen.

They sped down the flickering main roads. Once, when Broncho Billy glanced behind him, he thought he saw motorcycle headlights

following. But he devoted most of his attention to the fleeing coach.

William S. rode beside him. They gained on the closed carriage.

Broncho Billy drew his left-handed pistol (he was ambidexterous) and fired at the broad back of the driver. He heard the splintery clatter of the wooden bullet as it ricocheted off the coach. Then the carriage turned ahead of them.

He was almost smashed against a garden wall by the headlong plunge of his mount, then he recovered, leaning far over in the saddle, as if his horse were a sailboat and he a sailor heeling against the wind.

Then he and William S. were closing with the hearse on a long broad stretch of the avenue. They pulled even with the driver.

And for the first time, the hackles rose on Broncho Billy's neck as he rode beside the black-crepe coach. There was no sound but him, his horse, their gallop. He saw the black-garbed driver crack the long whip, heard no *snap*, heard no horses, heard no wheels.

His heart in his throat, he watched William S. pull even on the other side. The driver turned that way, snapped his whip toward the taller cowboy. Broncho Billy saw his friend's hat fly away, cut in two.

Billy took careful aim and shot the lead horse in the head, twice. It dropped like a ton of cement, and the air was filled with a vicious, soundless image: four horses, the driver, the carriage, he, his mount and William S. all flying through the air in a tangle. Then the side of the coach caught him and the incessant flickering went out.

He must have awakened a few seconds later. His horse was atop him, but he didn't think anything was broken. He pushed himself out from under it.

The driver was staggering up from the flinders of the coach—strange, thought Broncho Billy, now I hear the sounds of the wheels turning, the screams of the dying horses. The driver pulled a knife. He started toward the cowboy.

Broncho Billy found his right-hand pistol, still in its holster. He pulled it, fired directly into the heart of the fat man. The driver folded from the recoil, then stood again.

Billy pulled the trigger.

The driver dropped as the wooden bullet turned his heart to giblets.

Broncho Billy took all the regular ammo out of his pistol and began to cram the wooden ones in.

As he did, motorcycles came screaming to a stop beside him, and the five men from the tavern climbed from them or their sidecars.

He looked around for William S. but could not see him. Then he heard the shooting from the rooftop above the street—twelve shots, quick as summer thunder.

One of William S.'s revolvers dropped four stories and hit the ground beside him.

The Germans were already up the stairs ahead of Broncho Billy as he ran.

When the carriage had crashed into them, William S. had been thrown clear. He jumped up in time to see the vampire run into the doorway of the residential block across the way. He tore after while the driver pulled

himself from the wreckage and Broncho Billy was crawling from under his horse.

Up the stairs he ran. He could now hear the pounding feet of the living dead man ahead, unlike the silence before the wreck. A flickering murky hallway was before him, and he saw the door at the far end close.

William S. smashed into it, rolled. He heard the scrape of teeth behind him, and saw the rat-like face snap shut inches away. He came up, his pistols leveled at the vampire.

The bald-headed thing grabbed the open door, pulled it before him.

William S. stood, feet braced, a foot from the door and began to fire into it. His Colt .36s inches in front of his face, he fired again and again into the wooden door, watching chunks and splinters shear away. He heard the vampire squeal, like a rat trapped behind a trash can, but still he fired until both pistols clicked dry.

The door swung slowly awry, pieces of it hanging.

The *nosferatu* grinned, and carefully pushed the door closed. It hissed and crouched.

William S. reached up for his hat.

And remembered that the driver had knocked it off his head before the collision.

The thing leaped.

One of his pistols was knocked over the parapet.

Then he was fighting for his life.

The five Germans, yelling to each other, slammed into the doorway at the end of the hall. From beyond, they heard the sounds of scuffling, labored breathing, the rip and tear of cloth.

Broncho Billy charged up behind them.

"The door! It's jammed," said one.

"His hat!" yelled Broncho Billy. "He lost his hat!"

"Hat?" asked the one called Joseph in English. "Why his hat?" The others shouldered against the gapped door. Through it, they saw flashes of movement and the flickering night sky.

"Crosses!" yelled Broncho Billy. "Like this!" He pointed to his hatband.

"Ah!" said Joseph. "Crosses."

He pulled something from the one called Adolf, who hung back a little, threw it through the hole in the door.

"*Cruzen!*" yelled Joseph.

"The cross!" screamed Broncho Billy. "William S.! The cross!"

The sound of scuffling stopped.

Joseph tossed his pistol through the opening.

They continued to bang on the door.

The thing had its talons on his throat when the yelling began. The vampire was strangling him. Little circles were swimming in his sight. He was down beneath the monster. It smelled of old dirt, raw meat, of death. Its rateyes were bright with hate.

Then he heard the yell "A cross!" and something fluttered at the edge of his vision. He let go one hand from the vampire and grabbed it up.

It felt like cloth. He shoved it at the thing's face.

Hands let go.

William S. held the cloth before him as his breath came back in a rush. He staggered up, and the *nosferatu* put its hands over its face. He pushed toward it.

Then the Browning Automatic pistol landed beside his foot, and he heard noises at the door behind him.

Holding the cloth, he picked up the pistol. The vampire hissed like a radiator.

William S. aimed and fired. The pistol was fully automatic.

The wooden bullets opened the vampire like a zipper coming off.

The door crashed outward, the five Germans and Broncho Billy rushed through.

William S. held to the doorframe and caught his breath. A crowd was gathering below, at the site of the wrecked hearse and the dead horses. Torchlights wobbled their reflections on the houses across the road. It looked like something from Dante.

Helioglabulus came onto the roof, took one look at the vampire and ran his alpenstock, handle first, into its ruined chest.

"Just to make sure," he said.

Broncho Billy was clapping him on the back. "Shore thought you'd gone to the last roundup," he said.

The five Germans were busy with the vampire's corpse.

William S. looked at the piece of cloth still clenched tightly in his own hand. He opened it. It was an armband.

On its red cloth was a white circle with a twisted black cross.

Like the decorations the Indians used on their blankets, only in reverse.

He looked at the Germans. Four of them wore the armbands; the fifth, wearing an old corporal's uniform, had a torn sleeve.

They were slipping a yellow armband over the arm of the vampire's coat. When they finished, they picked the thing up and carried it to the roof edge. It looked like a spitted pig.

The yellow armband had two interlocking triangles, like the device on the chest of the costumes William S. had worn when he played *Ben-Hur* on Broadway. The Star of David.

The crowd below screamed as the corpse fell toward them.

There were shouts, then.

The unemployed, the war-wounded, the young, the bitter, the disillusioned. Then the shouting stopped. . . and they began to chant.

The five Germans stood on the parapet, looking down at the milling people. They talked among themselves.

Broncho Billy held William S. until he caught his breath.

They heard the crowds disperse, fill in again, break, drift off, reform, reassemble, grow larger.

"Well, pard," said Broncho Billy. "Let's mosey over to a hotel and get some shut-eye."

"That would be nice," said William S.

Helioglabulus joined them.

"We should go by the back way," he said.

"I don't like the way this crowd is actin'," said Broncho Billy.

William S. walked to the parapet, looked out over the city.

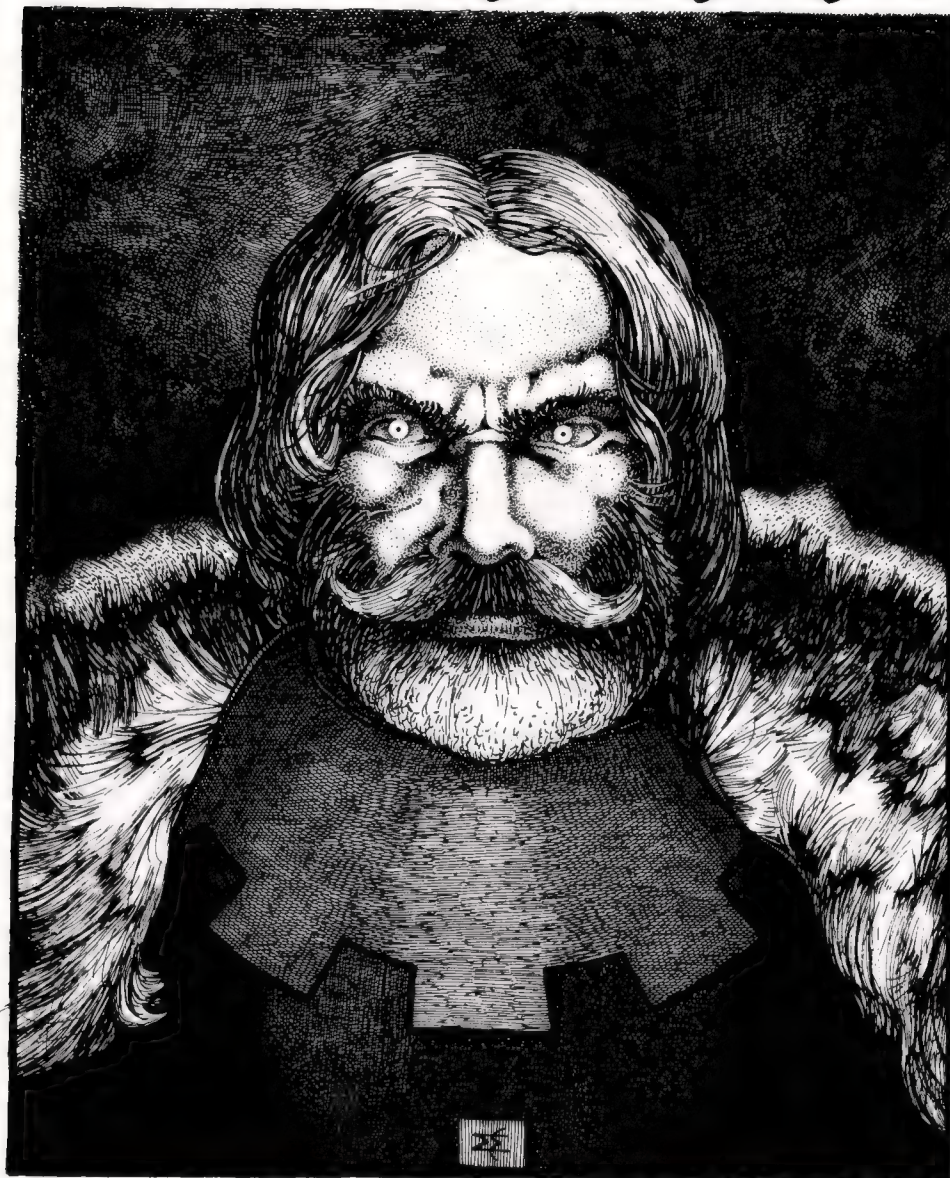
Under the dark flickering sky, there were other lights. Here and there, synagogues began to flicker.

And then to burn.

□

Karl Edward Wagner's

Reflections On The



Winter Of My Soul

A Portfolio Of Kane By JEFF EASLEY

Jeff Easley is a young Kentucky-based artist whose work has been published by others, but always in very limited editions. It is our opinion that Jeff deserves exposure; his work here will explain the reason why.

Easley's art, though exhibiting definite influences, is original and stylistically fresh. His study of design and anatomy has been intensive and his work shows evidence of the study. Jeff says it best himself: "I can't really cite any art influences on my drawing, seeing as how I've been doing it so long (since age four), though I might add that I've never seen anyone do pen and inks that even approaches Virgil Finlay. As far as painting is concerned, if I were to have my choice among illustrators to do me an original, I'm not certain of what it would be of but it would have 'Frazetta' in the corner of it."

Due to a bad experience at an early age, when he was accused of tracing another drawing, Jeff tends to shy away from using any references from other artists or from photos when doing an illustration, save when he just wants to see what something *looks* like. Thus, time is a big problem to Jeff; due to the "painstaking" style in which he does his black and white work, he often puts twenty or thirty hours into a single illustration. Besides that, his paintings entail four or five times as much work.

With only a semester to go before he graduates from art school, he seems a shoo-in to get commissions from paperback publishers. Unlike a great many young artists, when you get an Easley you get an original—not a watered-down version of someone else's art. We wish him our best.

Wagner's story is one of those pieces of fiction that is both intriguing and well-written. Werewolves are a dime-a-dozen, but Wagner's writing gives the story overtones of doom and of evil lurking around the next corner. Without giving away the plot of the story (available in *Death Angel's Shadow* from Warner Books) it is safe to say that the immortal, cursed Kane is put into a position where he must face an enemy as cunning and powerful as himself. Much in the manner of a pre-history detective story, the suspects are eliminated until only the werewolf and Kane remain. Their graphic confrontation, and the surprising climax places this among the best stories of its type. For those who have wondered just *who* this character is, this story explains it all, better than any other story in the series.

Plate One: "... For Kane's eyes were the eyes of Death."

Plate Two: "... he hurled it aside and jerked his sword up."

Plate Three: "It's a haunted night... Death hovers near..."

Plate Four: "Thus died Abel!"







2Easley 76



Illustration by Nestor Redondo

INTERVIEW:

C.L. MOORE TALKS TO CHACAL

A CONVERSATION WITH THE FIRST LADY OF FANTASY



While it's doubtful that she would ever consider her work as revolutionary, many observers can't help but feel that the outlooks of the science fiction field were radically altered with the publication of Catherine L. Moore's first story in November of 1933. Bearing the strangely sensual, if at first glance inexplicable title of "Shambleau," the piece brought depth and compassion (along with a strong undercurrent of sexuality) to a genre chiefly populated by insane scientists and their inane creations. If anything, Ms. Moore can be attributed with bringing a feeling of naturalistic intelligence to SF and fantasy—certainly, some of her characters had larger than life qualities on occasion, yet the reader could never quite doubt their humanity.

The effects of her first contribution to the field, as well as the effects of her subsequent

writings, are still being felt after nearly forty years. Interested parties can easily spot her influence on the field in the work of any number of popular authors, from Silverberg to Ellison.

From the Typewriter of C. L. Moore came classics of fantastic literature, stories that enthralled their readers with their lyrical beauty and sensitivity. "Black God's Kiss," "No Woman Born," "Daemon" and later in collaboration with her husband, Henry Kuttner, "Fury" and "Judgement Night"—all show the polished skill of a superior craftsman, er, *craftswoman*. It's interesting to think of Ms. Moore's career as a success story in the tradition of the old Hollywood news columns: "*Local Secretary Makes Good*."

When it was learned that Ms. Moore was scheduled as the guest of honor at a local convention, plans were made to conduct the following interview. After a lengthy discussion and the flip of a coin (which the Publisher swears to this day was *two-headed*), Editor Byron Roark was dispatched to converse with a legend while Fenner grumbled to himself and watched *The Sea Hawk*. He had these observations to make:

After reading and enjoying C. L. Moore's fiction for a long time, getting a chance to do an "in-person" interview with her came as a welcome and pleasant experience. From the moment I approached her via long distance, she was friendly and cooperative—she seemed as anxious to do the interview as I was.

Since my knowledge of her writing is limited to the works currently in print, I chose to dwell more on her personal life and the major



events therein. Since her subconscious seemingly guides her typewriter, she can't usually recall the evolution of a story, so maybe this tack was for the best. If you have any questions not answered here, I suggest you corner her at the World Fantasy Con over Halloween and ask them for yourself.

I met C. L. Moore at the BYOB-con in Kansas City late in May. Her presence brightened up an otherwise dismal affair where most people quickly took on the blank stare of zombie-ism. I felt like I was on an old Universal movie set—I expected Dwight Frye to walk in at any minute. He didn't, but C. L. Moore did. I cannot begin to explain the immediate reaction that nearby fans displayed—she was soon signing autographs and chatting with the multitudes. When the dust had cleared away, I approached her about the in-

interview and handed over a few books of my own for autographing. We made a date for later and I returned to the mundane existence of selling books at the dealers' room. I was in love.

Later on, we got together—I was armed with a tape recorder and a fixed list of questions. We talked for almost an hour before it occurred to me that a lot of information was going astray—the merits of Errol Flynn, Manly Wade Wellman, fans and other subjects escaped being put on tape. I plugged in the tape . . . and it suddenly occurred to me that my list of questions was quickly becoming obsolete, the conversation was going in a different direction than I had anticipated. And a lot more interesting direction at that.

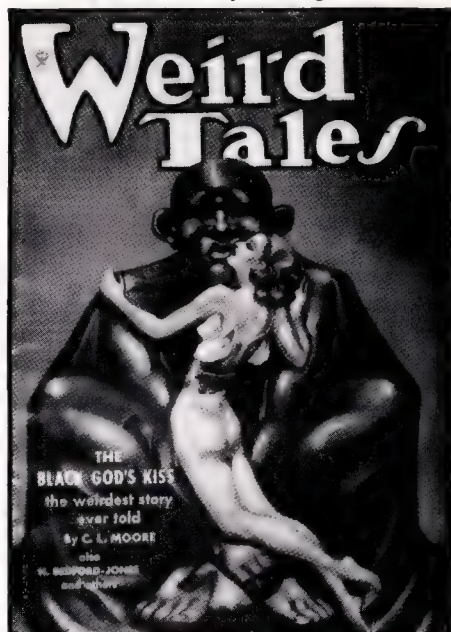
I found C. L. Moore (she has so many names that you have to pin it down to one) quite courteous, friendly and interesting—a quiet-spoken lady with a great deal of wit and charm. I felt comfortable talking to her after the initial nervousness had passed, but it took me a while to realize that this lady hasn't written anything in almost fifteen years. Her work is so full of vitality and originality that, for the most part, it holds up well despite the time that has passed since her works were first published. For an excellent example of her fiction at its best, I suggest you pick up a copy of the Ballantine paperback *The Best of C. L. Moore* just to see what all this is about.

C. L. Moore is also unique—she's gracious, attractive, talented and intelligent. The Lord saw fit to give her all these qualities. Does this happen in these days? Somehow I doubt it. There will never be another C. L. Moore.

Chacal: Could you tell us a bit about your background and early life prior to entering the writing field?

Moore: Well . . . when I was in my early adolescence, I had a series of fairly serious illnesses and I had to be taken out of school. I spent a great deal of time in bed, entertaining myself by reading everything I could get my hands on. It's strange, but I don't know how I ever got my hands on *Weird Tales* because it was strictly frowned on in my family—it was trash! But somehow, I did and I was thoroughly delighted with them. They were a brand new marvelous world. I'm sure I must have been thinking about those things for some years after I recovered . . . after I had finally gone through school and college. I had to stop college after three semesters and was very fortunate in finding a job. Still, I hadn't done a lot of writing in this field, although I had written a bit for my own amusement at various times—melodramatic stuff, very adolescent and fun to do. Then one afternoon, I was working in a bank, it was a rainy afternoon in the middle of the Depression, I had nothing to do—but I really should've looked busy because jobs were hard to get! I didn't want it to appear that I wasn't earning my daily keep! To take up time, I was practicing things on the typewriter to improve my speed—things like “the quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.” That got boring, so I began to write bits of poetry I remembered from my college courses. . . in particu-

lar, I was quoting a poem called “The Haystack in the Flood.” Anyone who is familiar with Victorian poetry will know who wrote it—I don't, because I can't remember! It appears now that I had misquoted a line. The poem was about a woman in 13th century France who is being pursued by enemies of some kind. . . she was running across a field and these men were after her. I had misquoted a line in my mind, as well as on the typewriter, and referred to a “red, running figure.” I now know that it was a reference to the three red, running lions on the British flag. At the time I thought, “Ha! A red, running figure! Why is she running? Who is she running from and where is she running to? What's going to happen to her?” Strangely enough, I just swung from that line of poetry into the opening of “Shambleau.” If you'll look at the beginning of the story, you'll see how it all happened. I went on from there and wrote the story. It came out very easily and quickly, as if it had been sitting there in the typewriter waiting. Then, after I finished it—I had been secretly reading *Weird Tales*,



Thrilling Wonder and other things, much to the disapproval of my parents when they caught me at it. At that age, I wasn't allowed to bring such trash into the house! Well, at any rate, the story was finished and sent off to *Weird Tales*. Whoops. . . I'll go back to the *Weird Tales* business in a minute! I had started reading *Thrilling Wonder* and though I liked it very much, the stories seemed kind of dull to me, because I was totally blank in any of these scientific areas. And that particular pulp bore down on the science aspect. Very little emphasis was put on characterization or action, really. Despite popular rumor, I didn't send it to any magazine of that type, but sent it only to *Weird Tales*. I say this because there was a peculiar rumor that started sometime ago about “Shambleau” making the rounds of all the magazines in the science fiction field before it finally came limping its sad way home to *Weird Tales*!

Chacal: Keeping in mind that WT was the absolute rock bottom of the weird/SF markets at that time, of course.

Moore: Absolutely right! But this story is so utterly untrue that it leaves me rather bewildered. . . and I didn't bother to deny it! In the first place, I simply didn't have that much confidence in myself; if anyone had rejected it, I would've have just said, “OK, forget it” and I would've went on to become something else.

Chacal: You brought out the point that *Weird Tales* and like pulps were considered “trashy” by your family before you entered the writing field. Did their attitudes change after you became an active contributor to their pages?

Moore: Not only my family, but most literate families I think must have looked down on “pulp” magazines in those days and probably would today if there were any. Face it—the best literature was not appearing in them. However, once I began to sell to this market my family bravely gulped and was proud and supportive of me, though I'm sure not changing their opinion of the genre in general. Actually, *Weird Tales* was unusual for the pulps and many of its contributors I seem to recall as much better than average writers.

Chacal: Looking over the things you've done through the years, one can ask, “What would the field've been like without C. L. Moore?” A strange thought. . .

Moore: I'm wondering where I would've gone? However, *WT* did buy my first story. By the way, I don't think I would've had the confidence to go on if anyone had rejected “Shambleau,” or certainly if more than one was turned down. My second story was called “Were-Woman” and it was rejected by the editor of *Weird Tales*. . .

Chacal: This was Farnsworth Wright?

Moore: Yes, it was the only one of mine he ever rejected and I never submitted it anywhere else because I figured he knew best. But he did buy “Shambleau”; it was published and turned out to be quite successful. So you can see how ludicrous the whole rumor was behind “Shambleau” searching for a home; if it had been bounced once it would've been stuck away and gathered dust.

Chacal: Definitely a victory for the forces of right! Was “Were-Woman” ever published?

Moore: It was published. I very foolishly, after a while, gave it to a fan magazine who wanted to print it. I thought, “Well, no one will ever see it but a bunch of fans. . . (laughter) they'll be very generous and kind and won't take it too much to heart if I did a rotten job!” The error that I made there was I didn't realize they had copyrighted it. (groans) So twenty years later, who but Sam Moskowitz. . . uh, performed his usual, um, practice of jumping on things two seconds after the copyright had lapsed! So he reprinted it, of course, without paying me anything for it. Incidentally, it is simply not a thing that any other publisher I know of has ever done. I have had stories of mine printed after the copyright had lapsed and I've always been

paid for them. Publishers just don't do things that way, but Moskowitz is an exception to the rule and nothing can be done about that!

Chacal: I've got my note-pad—now which stories did you say the copyrights had run out on? Don't look at me like that, I'm just kiddin'! (laughter) *What writers did you particularly admire when you were growing up?*

Moore: You know, that all seems so long ago it's hard to say. I read the Oz books (and knew them all by heart). . . *Alice in Wonderland* was a sort of Bible. Oh, the "Tarzan" books—I read all of those. Those, too, were very much looked-down-on; my mother thought they were pretty trashy and my dad would smuggle them in to me and I'd keep reading them. (laughter)

Chacal: After reading "Northwest Smith," I'm wondering if you read any of the "John Carter" novels. . .

Moore: Oh, yes! I'm glad you mentioned that—those were smuggled in, too.

Chacal: Has your viewpoint changed? Are there any current writers that you particularly admire?

Moore: I'm a long way off from the science fiction field now; I don't read very much. Of course, I love Bob Heinlein's work and although Bob Bloch hasn't written anything in our field for quite a while, I love the way he writes. He's just a wonderful guy. Another writer I admire, for some reason, is Henry Kuttner. (laughter)

Chacal: Really—I wonder why? Do you recall what your reaction was on finding that "Shamblau" had been accepted?

Moore: Well, after I sent it off to *WT*, I more or less forgot about it. One day I came home from work and there was a long letter on the hall table for me. I opened it up and it said that they were going to pay me a hundred dollars. And *that* was like TEN THOUSAND dollars at that time. I screamed at the top of my voice! My father came charging downstairs thinking that I had been murdered or something (laughter) and nobody believed it until they read the letter. Then joy was completely unconfined—everyone was so happy about it.

Chacal: Today, a hundred dollars would be an insult.

Moore: Now it would be like fifteen cents, but in those days—good heavens, I was only making twenty-five dollars a week—it was a real windfall. Besides that, my salary was good pay in those days.

Chacal: Did you realize the effect that "Shamblau" would have on the readers?

Moore: How could I?

Chacal: Well. . . it really did change the shape of fiction in the genre at that time.

Moore: So I hear, but I wasn't aware of it.

Chacal: The sexual element was more obvious than in other stories of its type.

Moore: I didn't intend it to be, it was just the way things worked out! It really hadn't occurred to me that the sexual element wasn't present in other stories. . . so many other characteristics were being left out in the scientific approach. The story was printed exactly as I wrote it; I never had any trouble with editors at all.

Chacal: Do you look upon your work as escapist fare or did you try to inject a message . . . some point of personal philosophy?

Moore: No message. . . then or ever. If it's in the material, and I think it probably is, because nobody can write a great deal of copy and fail to focus it around a set of unconscious values—still, the process was unconscious. It would take hours and a lot of thinking to expound a personal philosophy,

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so I must pass on it just now. I don't know that I looked on the stories as escapist, either. I just wrote what I felt like writing, and probably enjoyed it because it was escapist. But never intentionally.

Chacal: What was your reaction when most readers thought you were male? You were in the same boat as Margaret Brundage who did cover art for the magazine, it seems.

Moore: She did sign her covers with her last name, didn't she? Hmm. I think that her paintings were done in such a style that one could hardly mistake it as the work of a man! All right, let me explain why I signed my name that way. It was not at all pretending to be a man. The chief reason was that in those days, jobs were very hard to come by—it is hard for anybody today to remember or realize, but it was a very grim sort of financial situation everybody was locked into. The place where I worked was a very paternalistic organization and they were keeping people on for whom they really didn't have

any work. I had a very uneasy feeling that if they knew I had an extra income, I might be the next to get the axe! (laughter) So I thought. . . well, I don't want them to find out—it was a fairly remote chance that anyone in the office read *WT*—but I didn't want to take the chance. I got cautious, took my first two initials and put them on the story.

Chacal: And the rest is history! (laughter)

Moore: I suppose so.

Chacal: How did you inform the readership of your gender?

Moore: I didn't feel it was any of their business—besides, nobody asked.

Chacal: Did you continue at your job after you broke into the pulps? How long was it before your writing career supported you completely?

Moore: Oh, yes, I went on working at my regular job long after I broke into the pulps. *Weird Tales* bought everything I wrote and I began to make sales to *Astounding* too. I didn't quit the job until Henry Kuttner and I were married and moved to New York. From then on, we made our living entirely from writing. First C. L. Moore story: 1933. Marriage: 1940. After 1940 on we wrote for a living and did no other work, though we did much later move on into mystery novels and then into television, where the pay is considerably higher than in the pulps.

Chacal: I understand that Forrest J. Ackerman mentioned the title "Shamblau" at an awards dinner without mentioning anything about who did it, and it brought a halt to his speech. True?

Moore: Oh, this was just quite recently. I was very lucky in being given an award in Los Angeles. It was a big meeting in a huge room with lots and lots of dining tables. They had costumes and things—they tell me that in every large costume judging of that sort, somebody always comes out as Shamblau! This particular time a young lady with a lot of red snakes on her head came out and did a "Shamblau" dance—she was very good. Anyway, Forrest J. Ackerman was the Master of Ceremonies—they gave out the awards and he announced that a special award would be presented. Then he mentioned "Shamblau"—I mean, he didn't even get a chance to say who the writer was! The audience applauded—oh, it was wonderful! Everyone got on their feet clapping and I felt like sinking through the floor. I was terribly happy, it was all I could do not to cry!

Chacal: I guess that is adequate proof of how beloved and respected you've become in the field. . .

Moore: I like to think so—that moment would've made me feel good even if I didn't think so!

Chacal: How did you come to create Jirel of Joiry?

Moore: I would have to check back over my card file, which is not here at the moment, to see how many stories I did before bringing her into the picture. I think there were two or three Northwest Smith... *Northwest Smith* stories—try to say that quickly—before Jirel came into being. I guess I just got tired of writing about Northwest Smith. No doubt, I'd been reading something about France in the 13th century and here she came!

Chacal: Then you had no prior conception of what was formulating?

Moore: No—I'm sure it was just a case of sitting down and starting on a story.

Chacal: Many readers consider the "Jirel" stories your best work—why do you think they've remained popular?

Moore: Well, it broke convention, I suppose, though it wasn't intended to. I was really just amusing myself.

Chacal: I've always wondered why Jirel was set in a history familiar to us. Most authors of heroic fantasy tend to create worlds for their characters to live in—yet, Jirel was set in a "real" world.

Moore: Her country would be on no map that we'd have access to. It seems to me—and I haven't re-read them for years—that they took off from some realistic historical spot. A certain time and place, though she quickly ran off into some mysterious world so I didn't have to worry about being realistic.

Chacal: I recently re-read "Black God's Kiss" and noticed that she got into another dimension quickly...

Moore: She was always going into other dimensions—it was a lot easier to write that way! (laughter)

Chacal: The idea of going there for a weapon of revenge was an old plot idea, but the way you handled it made the theme seem fresh.

Moore: I think that the best of it came when she found out that she'd been mistaken all along! That helped a lot.

Chacal: Do you feel that the readers identified more readily with the blending of earthly reality and surrealism of an alien landscape?

Moore: I had not thought of the idea that readers would respond more readily to a blend of realism and surrealism, but I expect it's true. Nothing I wrote was premeditated or even done consciously. I just got a basic idea, a springboard, and took it from there. Looking back now I can see that sometimes I wrought better than I realized, and sometimes rather worse. Some of my stories drag horribly, but usually perk up toward the climax. Often it seems to me I was groping for some clue as to where the hell I was go-

ing, but eventually somehow seemed to make it. Since I believed the stories while I was writing them, I suppose I just assumed the readers would go along with me.

Chacal: Did you ever write yourself in as a character in any of your stories?

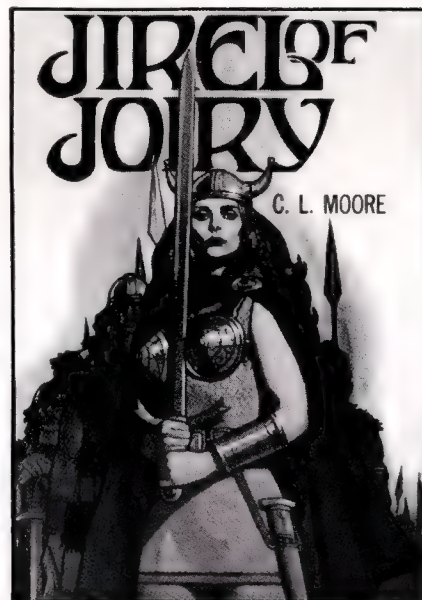
Moore: Not consciously... but don't you think everyone does to some extent?

Chacal: Undoubtedly. REH and HPL were known to do it all the time...

Moore: I'm sure they did. I hadn't thought of it, but of course they did.

Chacal: Several people claimed that HPL was Randolph Carter or that REH was Conan or idealized versions of what they thought themselves. I just wondered which of your characters was closest to your personality.

Moore: I don't think I'm the one to judge that!



Chacal: For instance, Jirel was a pre-liberation Women's Lib symbol. She was doing a man's job—er, what was considered to be a man's role—long before women's rights became a cause.

Moore: You know, I imagine that there were women like Jirel doing this type of thing...

Chacal: Like Anne Bonney...

Moore: Of course, the famous woman pirate. She dressed like a man and they couldn't tell that she wasn't when she didn't care for them to know.

Chacal: Rumor has it that you didn't particularly care for the story in which Jirel met Northwest, "Quest of the Star Stone." Could you give us a little background on the tale; the how and why of it?

Moore: I'd forgotten that I maybe like "Quest of the Star Stone" least—that doesn't

mean *dislike*. If I said so, I expect it's true. And if true, my guess would be that in this first Kuttner/Moore collaboration the machinery of working together had to be refined and worked over more before it functioned well. Hank and I had met, I think, a short time before this. Or had we met at all? Or only corresponded? Anyhow, he was urging me to do another Jirel and sent on a kind of opening situation to see if I would feel any interest. I did and we sent the ms. back and forth to the best of my very dim recollection until we were ready to submit it. Remember this was all 40 years ago and a lot has happened since.

Chacal: Overall, did you prefer to write SF, fantasy or the few mysteries you turned out in the 1950's?

Moore: Well, I don't think that I ever wrote science fiction—hard science fiction. Everything I did was fantasy, so that knocks out a third of the question right away! I think that fantasy was a lot more fun, but Hank and I wrote so many years at a frightening pace so much science fiction and fantasy that we ran out of ideas after a while. After that, we turned to the mysteries so we could take a turn in a new area.

Chacal: Of what I've read, I'd think that "No Woman Born" was as close as you ever came to hard SF, but it still remained fantasy.

Moore: I don't think any of them came close—no background in science and I didn't want to write hard science fiction. If I could've been given the knowledge by injections, I would've refused. It doesn't interest me, so I never thought in terms of science fiction at all.

Chacal: What have been your reasons for abandoning your writing in the last decade?

Moore: Well, Hank and I wrote for a living for about 17 of our 18 years together. As I've said before—we'd sit down and grind out a story 'cause the rent was due. Eventually this pace got to us—we stopped and Hank went back to college on the GI Bill. At this point, we were getting enough money from the government and making enough to get by, but it wasn't easy! That was a definite reversal of the full concentration we had been giving to writing. After he got his degree, we started working on the mysteries and ten of them altogether. During that time, we turned out a few science fiction stories, and found it difficult. We were dried out on science fiction—it might have picked up again later, who knows? After that period, we started out in television—Hank's death came right in the middle of our first script. From there on, I continued writing alone for television for about five more years. I also took over his writing classes at USC, so I was teaching and working at Warner Brothers. That was an interesting time.

Chacal: What shows did you work on for television?

Moore: I started out writing a western called

"Sugarfoot" and did a bunch of them; I also did some "Maverick" scripts and a few "77 Sunset Strip" episodes. There was another short-lived show that I worked on—"The Alaskans"—so those kept me busy for the years I was doing television work. I loved writing for television.

Chacal: Seems like you would've been a natural to write teleplays for "The Alfred Hitchcock Show."

Moore: That doesn't sound too attractive to me. I liked the westerns, they were a nice change.

Chacal: Do any certain scripts stick out in your mind as favorites?

Moore: "Maverick" was the most fun.

Chacal: Were these written under your own name?

Moore: I was Catherine Kuttner for most of those.

Chacal: Somehow, I don't think most fans think of you as writing teleplays for "Maverick"...

Moore: I don't think of *myself* in that way, but I guess I did all right. I certainly enjoyed it. At the end of that period, I met my present husband and writing was no longer a part of my way of life. It's still in the offing.

Chacal: How many shows did you write in your career in television?

Moore: Oh... maybe five per year. That's a wild guess; it could be way off, since it's just a figure off the top of my head.

Chacal: How long did it take to turn out an average script?

Moore: I can tell you exactly! (laughter) Six very exact weeks from the time the producer would say "Why don't we work up a story about so-and-so?" I'd go home and rough outline a story. They'd buy the outline if they liked it, then I'd do what they call a "treatment"—which is a fairly complete six page breakdown of the action. Then they'd buy that and send me home to do a script. They were always sure to give you your money in little pieces like that. I'd write the script, and it always took me six weeks each time. I don't know why.

Chacal: I still find it weird that you got into westerns. You never wrote any westerns before that, did you?

Moore: No, never. I loved westerns, though and I enjoyed reading them very much. Especially the works of William Patterson White, of whom no one's ever heard, I suppose. He was a delightful writer with a great sense of humor.

Chacal: Before we wander on to something else, why don't you tell us a bit about Henry Kuttner? What was he like?

Moore: He was the funniest person in the entire world! I've never known anyone else with such a wild sense of humor. He was a delight to live with because any wild thing was bound to happen at any time of the day or night! Hank was a lot of fun and great to work with—he was so unique that I hate to put a label on him. He was something completely unique that never happened before and could never happen again! He was a great punster and made up the most dreadful puns you can imagine. He would make up these long stories that led you along to frightful puns.

Chacal: I daresay there's evidence of that trait in his "Gallegher" stories—just insane stuff! Do you think Kuttner ever reached the peak of his abilities as a writer?

Moore: It's hard to say, we were having such a time of it. I think we were building up to a peak—we wrote four original paperback novels for Rocket Books that were all called by

**'I DIDN'T WANT
TO WRITE HARD
SF - IT DOESN'T
INTEREST ME'**

a similar title: *The Murder of Anne Avery, The Murder of Eleanor Colt, The Murder of A Mistress and The Murder of A Wife*. They were getting better each time—I think Hank would have been extremely good as he went on in time.

Chacal: Are there any particular anecdotes you recall about Kuttner?

Moore: I remember when we were writing "Fury," the first part was printed before we had even started on the second part! Actually, neither of us had any idea of how it would end up or where it was going. Eventually, on the final segment of it, we found that there was so much to be said that it was an awfully long final installment! (laughter)

Chacal: This was written by both of you? I see that Kuttner is credited with it.

Moore: Most of that stuff was written by us. Whoever knew where to go wrote on it—he'd write on it until he was lost, then I'd sit

down and type until I was run out.

Chacal: What pen names did you work under?

Moore: We had eighteen of them. There was Henry Kuttner, Lewis Padgett, C. L. Moore, Arthur Donald, Keith Hammond, Paul Edmond—and we had personalities for all of them! (laughter) Lewis Padgett looked very much like President Woodrow Wilson; he wore high stiff collars and his wife made whiskey sours and put bananas in them.

Chacal: Now that sounds pretty sickening!

Moore: Well, *she* liked them! Keith Hammond was a young, gangly kid who was rather embarrassed by everything he did. Arthur Donald, well, you never saw him from the front—he would be walking away. He had big, heavy shoulders—held his head kinda low and was very tall. I have no idea what his face looked like—it wasn't important! And so it went.

Chacal: What caused you to utilize so many pen names?

Moore: For one reason, we would have several stories in one issue of a magazine. For another, Hank collaborated with a chap named Arthur Barnes and I think they used a pseudonym just for that series. I didn't know Arthur very well, and I think their collaboration came to an end—but that was how Hank got started using a pen-name. So he just continued the practice, for some reason. Sometimes a story just seemed to *be* a Padgett story, so they'd be credited to that pseudonym. I was very choosy about using the C. L. Moore name—I didn't use it unless I really liked the story! (laughter) A lot of those things we had to write so fast that it wasn't possible to revise them, so I had to come up with some names to use instead of my own. We shifted off—one time I was Padgett, the next time, Hank was!

Chacal: Under these unique circumstances, what was the fastest story you ever turned out?

Moore: Hank could write about seven or eight thousand words an evening in one sitting, but I could never do that. He would just sit down and type until he was through, but I never timed myself, really.

Chacal: How many stories did you have going at once? Did you have several going or did you just write them as you needed the money?

Moore: They were needed *very* regularly! Usually around the end of the month! (laughter) We would finish one at a time, we never had them overlap. Thank goodness that we finished one before starting another.

Chacal: I guess it would've gotten very confusing working on a bunch at once—"then, in chapter four, Jirel fights the Martian menace"—or something. Do you think that there will be an upsurge of interest in Kuttner's work?

Moore: I would like to think so. I think one reason that he has not been getting his due—while I consider lesser writers have—is that he was so versatile, was so many people. He could write a good action story, he was a tremendous humorist. Did you ever read any of his “Hawkins” stories—the hillbilly series? Those were just delightful—really wild! The main characters were a family of mutants who were living in retirement in the hills. Grandpa never came down from the attic and slept most of the time—they kept “Baby” in a tank in the cellar... you get an idea where they could go from there!

Chacal: Do you think that part of the situation is that he seemed to have a longer “imitative” stage than most young writers?

Moore: He started out so young! He taught himself to write and for some reason, he was able to sell from the beginning when he still had a long way to go in perfecting his style. So, when anybody wanted to look down on his work, they could choose his early stories when he was still very immature, and claim he was a rotten writer.

Chacal: Depending, naturally, on your point of view! (laughter)

Moore: Naturally!

Chacal: Critics usually pick out the “Elak” stories when jumping on his fiction.

Moore: Oh, definitely! Those were very early, long before I knew him.

Chacal: Robert Bloch was spoken of the same way, before he broke away from his imitation-Lovecraft stories and wrote *Psycho*. I think he sold to WT at seventeen.

Moore: Hank wasn’t much older than that. He had a knack for turning out salable material at a very formative stage in his life. Bob Bloch is so good—he can be so funny when he wants! He’s just a joy to be with.

Chacal: What direction do you think Kuttner’s work would’ve taken, had he lived?

Moore: That’s an impossible guess. I suppose he would have gone on developing his great sense of structure and marvelous sense of humor, extending his own experiences also into the TV and scholastic areas he was entering at the time of his death. What the result would have been *nobody* can guess—but it would have been unexpected!

Chacal: Which of the works that you and Kuttner collaborated on do you like best?

Moore: I liked “Fury”. . . I don’t know why, but it is just the first story that I thought of. I really couldn’t answer that fairly—out of 250 titles, it isn’t easy to pick a favorite!

Chacal: Did you ever have any reservations about collaborating with Kuttner?

Moore: Nope. “The Quest of the Star Stone,” our first, worked out well enough to show us

we could do it and after that we never gave it much thought. We just went ahead and wrote, either separately or together, depending on how that particular piece of work progressed. Remember, we weren’t turning out stories for posterity, but for this month’s rent. I so often hear of collaborators who tear down each other’s work—even successful, long-established collaborators. We didn’t have time for that kind of nonsense. We just traded typewriters; when one got stuck the other took over with a minimum of rewriting. Often none at all. Usually none at all. With us, at least, it worked out fine. It was also very nice to have somebody who could take over when the other guy got stuck. We sincerely loved each other’s writing and enjoyed tremendously what came out of the other guy’s typewriter. It was a fine relationship.

Chacal: Do you have any favorites among your own work?

Moore: I like “The Fruit of Knowledge.”



Chacal: Ah, yes... the story with a guest appearance by God.

Moore: Yes, he did a walk-on. I enjoyed writing that very much.

Chacal: It was an excellent story. Telling the story of *Creation* from another viewpoint was interesting.

Moore: I told what *really* happened! (laughter) Another one I liked is spelled D-A-E-M-O-N, which I think is pronounced “Demon,” but I’ve been corrected quite often! (laughter) I like that one very much; I re-read it recently and it is something I never did anything like before or since. I’d like to trim it here and there—it ran a little too long—but I like it.

Chacal: The interesting twist was that the entire story was seen (and told) from the point-of-view of a “mental defective” instead of a narrator of “average” intelligence. I always wondered if the demons were really there?

Moore: How can you doubt it?

Chacal: Upon reading “*The Bright Illusion*,” I got the distinct impression that it was a parable about racial tolerance. Am I correct, or am I reading something into it?

Moore: It just came off my typewriter, but it probably was. Not consciously, but the idea was probably lurking somewhere in my mind.

Chacal: Is it true that you illustrated some of your stories for the pulps?

Moore: I did a few—they’re fair. I went to art school and did all right.

Chacal: I’m sure the extra money was welcome.

Moore: I think they only paid something like seven dollars a page. It was more fun writing, so I gave it up.

Chacal: Looking at your career as a whole, would you say you wrote for the pleasure involved or was money your basic consideration?

Moore: Well, anything I did in those days was for the money, but there were other things I could have worked at. I much preferred doing what I did.

Chacal: Did you correspond with any of your fellow writers back when you were actively publishing and writing?

Moore: Yes, there was a time when I did. I got quite a few letters from H. P. Lovecraft and we corresponded for a while. Then there was a chap named Robert Barlow, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of him.

Chacal: Yes, often in connection with Lovecraft.

Moore: He came through Indianapolis and stopped off once or twice. We got to be very good friends—we corresponded quite a bit. I visited him at his family home in Florida and met his mother; he was alone among his books and he was glad that there was somebody there he could talk to.

Chacal: He’s been painted by many as a tragic figure.*

Moore: Yes... a very complicated person with some hang-ups that were pretty hard to take—from his viewpoint. I mean *he* took it hard; it was unnecessary, but that’s the way it was.

Chacal: Sad... I just know what I’ve read about him, but he seems...

*Editor’s Note: Robert Barlow was an early member of the Lovecraft circle of followers and became, briefly, the executor of the HPL estate. A confessed homosexual, Barlow committed suicide on Jan. 2nd, 1951, reputedly to escape blackmail threats made by two Mexican boys.

Moore: I understand that when he died in Mexico somewhere, he was studying one of the lost Central-American Indian languages that had never been translated. From what I heard, he was well on his way to figuring out what it was all about at the time of his death. So he was a great loss—it's a pity he didn't live in a time where his quirks were a bit more acceptable.

Chacal: Or at least tolerated. Was your courtship with Kuttner started up through the mails?

Moore: He wrote to me—and began his letter "Dear Mr. Moore!" (laughter)

Chacal: No doubt that supplied a few chuckles.

Moore: Yes, then I told him I was a girl. Shortly after that incident, I went on a trip out to California with a girlfriend and he and Bob Bloch took us out. Bob was visiting at the time—we did the town and had a lot of fun. When I came back, Hank wrote and asked if I'd like to marry him—if I'd be willing to marry him. I said, "No, no." Eventually he did what he had been planning to do for a long time—that was to give up his job and move to New York. That was supposed to be where the action was. He came from New York to Indianapolis several times and finally talked me into it. . . and I never have regretted it!

Chacal: Do you remember anything in particular about your correspondence with REII?

Moore: We really had such a short period to correspond that I don't remember much, except that he seemed interesting and had a good mind. We had enough common background that we were able to talk to each other, on paper anyway. I think he would have been pleasant to know just as Lovecraft would've.

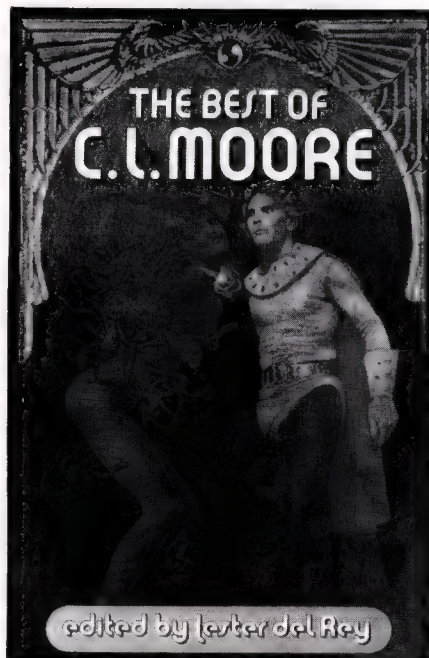
Chacal: Did you ever have any contact with August Derleth? So many authors' work have been published by limited edition press—has there been any such interest in your works?

Moore: I don't know if we corresponded in the pre-Kuttner days. Hank and I visited him briefly in Sauk City after our marriage, and I think HK and Derleth had known one another before—oh yes, I'm sure of it, I have some snapshots of him with E. Hoffman Price, from the days before our marriage. As for publishing relationships with Derleth, I'm sure he published some of our stories in his collections, but the limited edition publication idea is not one that my agent has suggested, and his word is gloriously final. Not knowing how that kind of publication works, I would guess that it's not the most profitable use of a writer's material. I want to remind you of something important here:

To wit: Hank and I made our living by writing and publishing our works. It is delightful to have fans enjoy reading them after all these years, and delightful to meet and talk with all you great people. I look forward to

many more meetings. But when it comes to publishing these stories, I have to remember that my living in a great part comes from getting the best prices my agent can arrange. I've been approached several times by people who want to bring out collections but who must arrange their own publication and who aren't able to make any specific offers of money. I'm always pleased and flattered to hear from them, but must refer them to my agent to arrange terms. The decision is his, and I am tremendously grateful to him for being such a guardian of my interests (and his) in getting the best possible payment in whatever market pays best. I know very little about the limited-edition market, but I have the impression these publications were often done for the love of it. My job is—or has been—writing, and the modest luxury I now live in is the result of getting paid well for everything of ours that is printed.

Chacal: Well said and understood. How did it feel to be one of the few women in a predominantly . . .



Moore: I loved it! I just loved it! (laughter)

Chacal: You were one of the few women writers within the circle.

Moore: There were a couple more, but they weren't very prolific. Actually, I *did* love it, but only because I like men! I can communicate with men much easier than with the average woman. Although I have women friends who are nice to be with, there aren't as many as the men who are *delightful* to be around! (laughter)

Chacal: I should hope each sex thinks that way of the other! That would seem to be the consensus of opinion. (laughter)

Moore: Really, I never thought of myself as being a *woman* writer—just a *writer*. The same was true when I was working at Warner Brothers; I was almost always the only woman writer in the building and it was a lot of fun being there with a lot of *men* who

were in my own field who I could talk to. I enjoyed their conversation—and I was never made to feel that I was an outsider in any way. This is why Women's Lib is a little confusing to me: I've always functioned within a man's field as a writer and was never pushed aside or run over. I was always on an equal basis with other writers.

Chacal: Acceptance makes all the difference. Are there any unpublished C. L. Moore or Henry Kuttner tales?

Moore: Probably. Somewhere around. Almost certainly unpublished because they weren't good enough. We sold just about 100% of what we submitted, but that doesn't mean everything we wrote. If we realized a story wasn't up to the standard we usually junked it. I probably have a lot of unfinished starts somewhere. I'll look around one of these days.

Chacal: If you decide to clean out your attic, let me know! How would your writing today be different from you "old" fiction? Has C. L. Moore changed much over the years?

Moore: I wish I knew. Probably it would be better structured, after my years in television where you have to have a brief plot in mind before you get an assignment. I'd like to think that it would be more mature, more anchored in reality, though not, I hope, at the expense of the fantasy element. After all the experiences of all these years no doubt the old C. L. Moore is a different person, though I'd like to think the original is a basic element which hasn't really changed, just been added to.

Chacal: I like them both. Is there any chance of new work from the C. L. Moore of now?

Moore: I do hope so. That's the best I can say—I'm thinking!

Chacal: I hope so, too. . . think harder! As you look back over your career, is there anything you would change or have done differently if given the opportunity? Is there something you look forward to doing in the future?

Moore: Certainly, I'd have changed everything ten times over and wound up with a terrible mess, probably. How lucky we can't meddle with the past. Actually, looking back like this, I get the distinct feeling that in my life so far I've just been along for the ride. Not directing it at all, but accepting and enjoying the events—well, mostly enjoying them—just as they come. Even the unhappiest times seem to bring along with them whatever it takes to endure them, and there's been much more good than bad. Any changes in past events would have to mean changes in the present, and I like the present just fine. I've been Mrs. Thomas Reggie for thirteen years now, and feel like somebody in a different world and time—often breathtakingly different. Looking back brings, of course, some sadness, some nostalgia even now and it probably always will. But I'm here in a new world with a whole new kind of living and it's a very fine world indeed. I wish all of you luck as good as mine. □



Illustration by Frank Frazetta

The Ballad of Suezy Nell

There are dark deeds done in the East, my son, where women are bold and bad;
There are crimes of hell, which, were I to tell, would freeze your blood, begad!
But from Canton quay to Tripoli, from Guam to Java's shore,
The toughest dame that a man could name was Nell of Singapore.

She was just eighteen when she first was seen in the dens of the glamorous East,
In the company of Cap McTee, a sinful and lustful beast.
He hazed his crew till the air turned blue, the wickedest man alive,
And Nell had run from a murder done in a lousy limehouse dive.

They made their sport in every port, where wine and the black rum ran,
And sin and shame and the Devil's game were the only choice of man.
And many a night the stars shone white on bloody deeds at sea,
And the waters hid the crimes they did, as the corpse sank silently.

But Cap McTee, on a devil's pree, stepped out with Suez Sally,
And vengeful Nell became the belle of Tong Lao's bowling alley.
But she didn't forget McTee, you bet; her hate would make you shiver.
And Cap McTee was lost at sea with a knife stuck through his liver.

Then Nell, that dame of scarlet shame, bought her a gambling house,
Where she lured in mutts with iron guts, but the brains of a drunken louse.
She pinched their pay and let them lay in the gutters and slimy ditches;
She sold them booze and took their shoes, and even stole their britches.

Her soul was dark as a tiger shark, her house was a cobra's nest—
Till a knock-kneed Jew from Timbuktu gave her a screening test.
Now loathsome Nell is a movie belle, with a fixed and painted smile,
And she's making good in Hollywood by the craft of her vampire guile.
And strong men yell for a look at Nell, and the papers bill her Grand
High Countess Luria of Manchuria, Java, and Togoland!

by Robert E. Howard

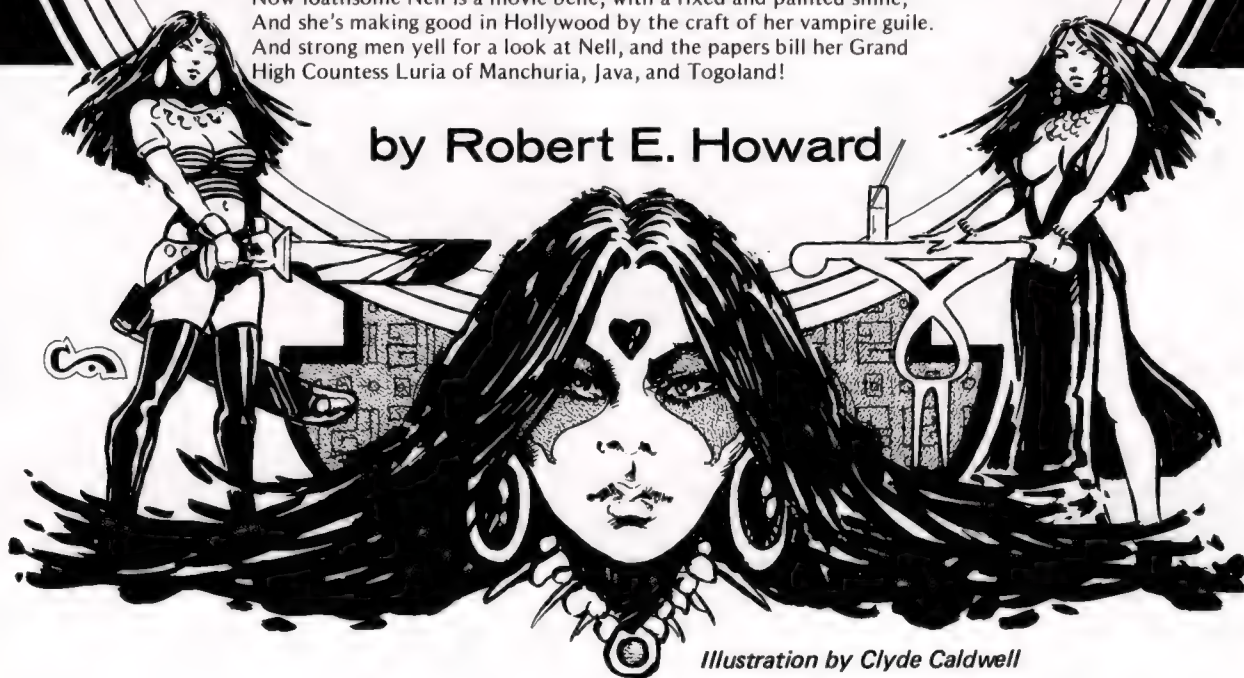


Illustration by Clyde Caldwell



Illustration by David Ireland

MISTRESS OF WINDRAVEN

by TOM REAMY

I dreamed again last night of Windraven Hall. It was as I had seen it last, a gaunt ruin on the edge of the sea. Gulls circled the blackened fingers of stone and blackbirds nested in the creepers that relentlessly covered the ugly wounds. The great stone arches of the central hall still stood, curved against the pale sky like the bones of some huge dead beast picked clean by vultures.

Only the low west wing had escaped the fire. I knew Alex was there, in his library, perched like a blind bird among his books, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, wanting nothing.

In my dream I again left Windraven Hall as I had done that last time with my few meager possessions in my old wicker valise. I turned once more at the edge of the meadow and look at the blind windows of the west wing. Was there a movement at the window? Did he look out at me... or was it only the reflection of a gull?

Windraven Hall, where my dreams began and seemingly must forever end in a dream.

"Well, darling, at least she doesn't set the tiresome things in Cornwall. Jesus! If one more gothic set in Cornwall comes across my desk, I swear I shall go screaming through the steno pool. Most of them know as much about Cornwall as I know about the far side of the moon. Why can't one of the wretched things be set on a wheat farm in Nebraska?"

"My God, the artist doesn't have to read them. I just tell him the location and the period and he paints the girl and the house with the light in one window. The lucky bastards! I'm the one who has to read the god-dam things.

"Her real name is Agnes Gooch, or something. We were the ones who changed it to Valentina Hope. That's probably why the book is doing so well. The tiny brains out there look at it with their usual perception and see 'Victoria Holt.'

"No, I haven't met the woman. The book came through the mail and now she has an agent. It's just as well. Spare me from lady novelists. *Oops!* Don't let that get over to *Cosmo*; I'll be drummed out of my own sex.

"Well, darling, I did get a tiny bonus from R. T. for buying the book. The agent says she's started another one.

"I have to hang up now, darling. I have a luncheon engagement with Manly Armbruster. What a Cosmic Jest! Imagine anyone naming that old fruit 'Manly.' If his readers only knew! Cocktails tomorrow?"

"Fine. The Pied Piper at seven. See you then, darling. Bye, bye."

He leaned over her shoulder and looked at the sheet of paper in the typewriter. "I dreamed again last night of Windraven Hall," he muttered and then cocked his eyes at her. "Isn't that a bit Daphne du Maurier-ish?"

Agnes Grover sighed and leaned back in the chair. He knew she didn't like him reading over her shoulder—and he hadn't shaved again that morning. "Actually, I thought it was a bit Jane Eyre-ish. Don't you have something to do?"

"Don't get peevish, *Valentina*," he grunted and continued to read. "Don't you think

you're a little heavy on bird imagery?"

"No."

"What's this one called?"

"I don't know." She knew he didn't care what she called it. She knew he was looking for an argument. "It doesn't make much difference. The titles usually don't mean anything, anyway. How about *Gothic Romance No. 792*?" She tried to keep the sarcasm from her voice.

"There must be more of them than that," he said over his shoulder going into the kitchen. "Don't forget to leave a light burning in the window." He guffawed and she heard him open the refrigerator and pull the tab a beer can.

"Damn you, Howard!" she said softly. "God damn you, Howard!"

I first saw Windraven the summer of my eighteenth year.

After the deaths of my dear parents of brain fever, I posted a letter to my uncle telling him of my plight. My father, though a gentle and loving man, was not a wizard with finances. My small legacy was eaten up completely by his debts, leaving me penniless and alone. My uncle, a poor but kindly man, agreed that I might live with his family until such time as I married or found a position of my own.

It was also that same day, in the summer of my eighteenth year, that I first looked into the laughing grey eyes of Alexander Culhane.

My uncle's man met the post chaise at Weymouth. We rode along the Dorset coast in a dray pulled by a dappled mare of sweet disposition and indeterminate age. It was a sugary day, warm and still, the air thick and sweet with the scent of freshly scythed hay. Larks trilled in the meadows and hedge sparrows quarreled merrily in the low hedgerows on either side of the quaint country lane. It was such a perfect English summer day my recent tragedy was put quite out of my head.

I saw the great house across the long swell of a meadow, a dark silhouette against the sea.

"What is that?" I asked, strangely affected by the somber beauty of the scene.

My uncle's man, whose name was Jaban, halted the dray. The old mare began to nibble at the sweet grass between the ruts of the lane. Jaban turned in the seat and squinted against the bright sky. He shifted the clay pipe in his mouth and spoke with it clenched in his teeth.

"That be Windraven Hall, Mistress," he said.

"Who lives there?" I asked.

"They be the Culhanes. Most for leagues around be Culhane land, even the croft where the young mistress's uncle be a freeholder."

Jaban had turned back to flick the dapple with the reins when we heard the pounding hoofbeats on the opposite side of the lane. I looked away from Windraven Hall as the night-black stallion leaped the hedgerow. The rider reined him in, just in front of the dray, and the horse reared, his skin shimmering like midnight silk.

I gasped and lay my hand to my bosom. The powerful beauty of the horse and rider quite took my breath away. Jaban tipped his hat to the young man and the young man nodded as he guided the stallion to the side of the dray. He pushed his wind-blown hair from his face, hair as black as the stallion, and stroked the horse's neck with his bare hand. The horse stepped in place impatiently and dug at the turf with a shiny black hoof. The muscles coiled under the horse's black hide much as they did in the young man's thigh under the soft cloth of his breeches.

I looked up and into sparkling grey eyes in quite the most handsome face I had ever seen.

"Good morrow, Jaban. Who is your passenger?" he asked, never taking his eyes from mine.

"This be the niece of Edward Bronwyn, Master Alex," Jaban said, tipping his hat again.

The young man on the horse smiled. "Does the niece of Edward Bronwyn have a name?"

"India Bronwyn, your Lordship," I said boldly, then lowered my bonnet to hide my blush.

The young man laughed and I looked up again. His head was thrown back in merriment. "I be no lord, Mistress. No drop of royal blood in these veins." His speech before had been that of an educated man, but now he spoke in the peasant dialect of the district, seemingly as a jest.

"You pardon, sir," I said lowering my eyes from the power of his gaze.

"Granted, Mistress India." He bowed slightly and touched the stallion easily with the heels of his boots. The magnificent animal leaped away and galloped down the lane, then over the hedgerow, speeding across the meadow.

I turned in the seat of the dray as Jaban flicked the reins. The old dappled mare moved slowly and ponderously, so greatly in contrast to the beautiful black animal and his rider. As I watched the stallion was reined in and turned. Alex Culhane looked at me again from the center of the meadow, then he wheeled the horse and continued toward Windraven Hall.

"Master Alex be the best of the Culhanes, but he also be the youngest," Jaban said. "He'll never be the master of the land."

Agnes Grover dropped towels in the pool of water spreading rapidly across the kitchen floor from the washing machine. It was the third time that month and the repair man wanted seventy-five dollars to fix it. She was squeezing towels out in the sink when the doorbell rang. She dropped the sopping towel and dried her hands, then heard Howard going to the door.

He came into the kitchen a few moments later with a special delivery letter. He dropped it on the cabinet and looked at her. She picked it up and saw the return address of her agent. She knew what was in it. She put it back on the cabinet without opening it.

Howard snorted. "Doesn't the successful lady author want to know how much it is?"

"It can wait," she said and went back to work with the towels.

"Wait for what?" he said. "Wait until I'm

not around so my ego won't be bruised?"

"All right, Howard," she said softly and tore the end off the envelope. She looked at the check.

"How much?" he asked.

"Fifteen hundred."

"That should keep the wolf away from the door until the new one is finished. Adding it to the other checks you used to catch up on the bills and pay my debts makes a very tidy sum."

"Howard, please."

"Now you can get the washing machine fixed; even buy a new one if you want to."

"Howard, you're being ridiculous!" She clamped her lips together. She was letting him do it again, letting him lure her into an argument.

He looked at her for a moment, victory in his eyes. "Ridiculous, am I? Ridiculous because you have to support me?"

"No, Howard."

"Ridiculous because I can't find a job and have to be supported by Valentina Hope?"

"No!" she yelled. "You're ridiculous because you make so much of it. Why shouldn't I support you when I can? I'm your wife. This marriage is a partnership. We're supposed to be helping each other. Why is it so important to you?"

"Because I don't feel like a man any more!"

"More important things than money make a man. Do you want me to stop writing the way you've stopped looking for a job? Do you want us to lose the house and the car? Do you want us to starve?"

He slapped her. She leaned against the sink and forced herself not to cry.

"Why didn't you go to New York like they wanted? Why didn't you go to the cocktail parties and be interviewed by the newspapers?" he growled through his teeth.

"I didn't want to go to New York."

"Maybe when you've sold a few more books we can move to New York, get a penthouse apartment, and I can stay around to answer the phone for you."

"Howard, please stop it! You didn't mind when I was writing the first book. You thought it was fun. You bragged about it."

"Because I didn't think it had a chance in hell of ever selling!" He stalked from the kitchen and a moment later she heard the front door slam.

"Don't track water through the house," she said softly and began to cry.

I was awakened in the middle of the night by screams.

I sat up in bed and listened. I could hear nothing but Hagan's snores as he lay beside me, still sleeping. I thought for a moment it had been a dream, then the screams came again. It was Emmaline, I knew. I woke Hagan.

He stirred and sat up, his face so like and yet so unlike Alex's. "Emmaline has gotten out of her room," I said and then smelled the faint odor of smoke.

Hagan sniffed and jumped out of bed. We raced down the stairs of the east wing, not even taking time to put dressing gowns on over our nightclothes. The odor of smoke grew stronger and I soon saw flickering lights from the direction of Emmaline's room.

"Stay here, India," Hagan said and rushed toward the open door from which came the light of the flames. He went inside and I heard Emmaline's screams grow more frenzied in her madness. Soon Hagan emerged from the room dragging a limp form.

Even at that distance and in the smoke I could see it was Alex. I ran to them. "My God, India," Hagan groaned. "She's killed Leo. I must get him out."

"No, Hagan!" I cried as he was hidden from view by the smoke. Alex moaned and I looked at him. A cut bled freely on his forehead where he had been struck. I put my hand on his chest and felt his heart beating strongly.

There was a sudden crash from the burning room as something collapsed. Emmaline's screams rose suddenly in pitch. I went to the door but was driven back by the heat. "Hagan!" I cried, but received no answer. As I watched, something moved in the flames. It was Emmaline. She ran from the room, herself a living flame. Even now, I sometimes wake in the night and seem to hear those screams. She ran down the hallway and smashed through the glazed doors into the garden. There she fell and her screams were stilled, her tortured mind finally at peace.

I tried to pull Alex away from the fire, but his weight was more than my small strength could manage. I was almost given in to panic when I heard someone call. It was Jaban. With him was Uncle Edward and Aunt Sophie and my cousins. They pulled Alex to safety while Jaban lent me his strong arm.

Other neighbors came and, with the servants, extinguished the fire. Only Emmaline's room and the one above were damaged greatly, but Hagan was dead. Leo was dead. Emmaline was dead. All who had inhabited the great house were dead except Alex and myself.

In the summer of my twentieth year I was a widow and no longer the mistress of Windraven Hall.

Howard Grover pulled the pages from the wastebasket and looked at them. He shuffled through them and raised his eyebrows questioningly at his wife. "I thought you'd finished this thing."

"I'm changing the ending."

"Oh?"

"I decided not to burn Windraven Hall. When the middle brother's mad wife sets fire to the place, they manage to put out the fire. I decided to have a happy ending."

"You always were one for a happy ending."

"Please, Howard. I want to get this finished."

"Does dear, sweet little India still marry Alex's elder brother?"

"Yes." She said softly, "The heroine always marries the wrong man first." She looked at him but he was still scanning the pages. "It's part of the formula. Instead of having Alex become a psychotic recluse in the ruins of Windraven Hall and India leave because she can't get through to him, I'm having him come to his senses and marry her."

"And they live happily ever after."

"Of course."

"Too bad real life isn't that way." He tossed the pages back in the wastebasket and

went into the kitchen. She heard him open the refrigerator door and pull the tab on a can of beer. Then he turned on the television even though he knew it made it difficult for her to work.

"Darling, you mustn't call me at the office. I'm hanging onto my job by my fingernails."

"Well, R. T. has been the teeniest bit forgiving since the book is selling in spite of everything. I don't know what came over me. I must have been possessed. Do you know a good exorcist?"

"At least I had the perspicacity to change the title from Gothic Romance No. 792 to The Mistress of Windraven. R. T. would never have forgiven that."

"I know it doesn't mean anything, but the titles of these things never do."

"We haven't been able to find her. Agnes Gooch, or whatever her name is, has disappeared from the face of the earth. I even went to that horrid provincial town where she lives looking for her myself. Her husband hadn't seen her since she mailed the manuscript to her agent. After seeing Harold Gooch, or whatever his name is, I can't say that I blame her."

"R. T. has been frantic. The first two books are selling very well and he wants another. The Mistress of Windraven is selling even better than the first one—in spite of that wretched cover."

"You haven't seen it? My God, I thought everyone in the world had seen it. I don't know what possessed that mad artist to paint it. I don't know what possessed me to accept it."

"It's too horrible to even think about. It's just the same as all the gothic covers except there's no girl in the foreground. There's just the house. And in the house all the windows are lit. All the windows are lit except one!"

"Please don't call me at the office again, darling, until R. T. gets over his little snit. Cocktails tomorrow? See you then, darling. Bye, bye."

I stood on the grand staircase of Windraven Hall, listening to the music swell through the great house and watching the dancers whirl on the polished floor. It was the happiest moment of my life; the ball in honor of my marriage to Alex Culhane. In the summer of my twenty-first year I was again mistress of Windraven, but it was of no importance. As the wife of Hagan Culhane it had been an empty joy. Now, it meant nothing to me. My only pleasure was the love of my husband.

Alex came up the staircase toward me, his handsome face bathed in smiles and his night-black hair for once under control. He took me in his strong arms and crushed me to his chest. He laughed and motioned upward with his head.

Laughing, I ran ahead of him. The hallway was bright with light. Candles burned everywhere. Every room in the house was filled with waxen sunshine. The candle makers of Weymouth had been kept busy for months in preparation for this night at Windraven Hall.

With Alex's aid I quickly extinguished all the candles in our bedroom, then I was in his arms where I would stay forever and ever. □

The End Of Days



Illustration by Steve Fabian

by DAVID C. SMITH

...AND THE DARK THINGS OF NIGHT AND SHADOW AROSE

*The trail is placed and run that we must follow,
The Destin'd trail. 'Tis none of ours to choose,
The trail that only runs from night to night
From out the grey dawn's cynic and mocking light
Into the smouldering sun-set's crimson wallow.
I only know that though we win, we lose.
I only know that all conflict must cease.
That always after war, comes, somehow, peace.*

—Robert E. Howard
"Futility"



At the end of days, men fell against one another in murdering disunion; and the dark things of Night and Shadow arose from the old Dawn to prey upon humankind. An invisible wind swept over all the lands, like a foul incense sent by the dark gods. Seemingly it corroded cities, brought despair and disease and death to populaces. Thrones which had stood strong for centuries now crumbled under this slow fetor. Nations which had withstood centuries and generations of war and famine and revolution, withered like dying blossoms in the forefront of this wind. It was not a real wind. It was the wind of Time; it was the breath of Fate; it was the miasma from the corpses of dead and dying gods. And with this flowing ceaseless wind boomed the invisible chords of a knelling iron bell—the sounding of the gong, making an end to things. The old days were past; the ancient days of history and myth were dead; the twilight of the ages—like the twilight of a warm day—had at last shadowed the lands of man's dominance.

Agas ago, it seemed now, the throne of Neria—that nation of nations—had collapsed into disruption; a succession of tyrants and madmen reigned what had once been the kingdom of the Na-Kha, and the mightiest state of the histories was battered to useless tracts of bloody sod by rebellious lords and half-lords and third sons of brothers. Then the winds had come. And centuries ago, the recurrent wars amongst Khom and Logne and Samdum and Kheba had blazed into internecine battles; and here a good monarch had died before his time, and there the throat of a strong state was throttled by some unremembered man or cause or ancient curse. Then the winds had come. Years ago only, it seemed, trade had sunk slack, dwindled, stilled; the mighty houses of religion and education were turned more and more towards the abstract, the perverse, towards the dead-ly inhuman. But months ago, war and pillage had conquered; Amer fell, and Argalon fell, and Salasal and Setom and Loksim fell, one after another. And then the winds had come.

Seers of the eastern metropolises and shamans of the northern wood-huts had foreseen this, and had sworn to it, and had committed it to parchment and myth. And with the passage of the slow centuries—nearly so

slow that one long life could not interpret the events, so slow that a single lifetime could rationalize the disorders—in that span, short by the doomed gods' reckoning, the end of days had commenced for men. Finally, as if abruptly, they had awakened to it; and as if the awakening had dispelled the comfortable dream, men saw now that the nations of their ancestors were swiftly sinking into an abyss—the heights of the ages brought low, the chimeras of perfection shattered as if of sheerest crystal, the dazzling luster corroded as if nothing more than aerugo-eaten tomb-gold.

The end of days was at hand. The All-Night had come.

And sorcery, long-banished, furtively practiced throughout the period of man's holding the lands, now openly defied whatever remained of mankind's spirit, whatever remained of humanity's bluster and toil and suffering and longing hope. The old shadow of sorcery crept over the fields and hills and rivers, brought with it the enshrouding mists of Fate, rained down upon the ruined cities and browned plains and the stagnant inland lakes a rain of fire and not ablution. The shadow of sorcery was one with Time and one with Fate and one with Death, and it moved upon the last of man's dominions as a cerement pulled over the clustered corpses of the gods who, themselves, now lay dead in the heavens beyond the stars.

But a man doesn't die in a day, yet stretches it out over a lifetime, growing and learning as he dies. So, too, with nations. The Shadow of the Dawn was thrown over cities in the time of their Twilight; yet, on warm afternoons, it might have been as it was a millennium earlier, for all the difference to be told at moments when the sun sparkled on the pond water, when the conversation drifted into happy personal reflection. And kings and generals and farmers and priests, trapped by their years, unimaginative and not seeing beyond either of the horizons girdling their span of breath, thought and walked and spoke as had their grandsires. They planned campaigns; they married women; they raised sons; they prayed to gods.

But if anyone of them had been lifted to the heights of the gods, or if anyone of them had managed to live for three lifetimes rather than one, then he would have wept to see what he would see: humankind spiralling into the pit of darkness; gold and silver crumbling to dust; dreams and crowded memories blowing away as if ever unimagined. And the shadow of sorcery, the weight of the Outside, pressing upon the light of human day like the veil of Night cast over the waiting day's Dawn—never to brighten a living thing again.

Out of the frosty night air and into the odored warmth of a dock-side tavern came two young men, laughing and jesting. They were handsome youths; the one was dressed in a soldier's harness, and his dark hair and beard and eyes complemented his imposing attire, while his companion wore the tunic and short cape of a scholar, his well-trimmed blonde locks and soft hands betraying days

spent indoors with tutors. Both hailed the tavern-keeper amiably as they pushed their way through the crowds, and they threw smiles to the dancing-girls who pranced and postured at one end of the room. Nods and gestures travelled the tavern as sailors and soldiers and common men and whores who knew the men spoke below the din: "Count Ambrul's son," and "Lord Ceres' lad."

They took a corner table, not ignorant of the slight attention they drew, and they ordered wine and beer from the husky who waited on them.

The scholar shielded his mouth with his hand and mentioned to his friend: "See their stares? The whispers? They hate us, Thedir. We're gentry amongst the rabble."

"Aye," laughed the soldier, showing his grin around the room. "And I hate them, Niror, as well. The fools." He paused as their jugs and cups were set before them. Thedir eyed a dark-haired dancer appreciably, and nodded to her; she ignored him. He murmured an obscenity.

Niror tasted his wine, studied Thedir. "You haven't changed," he said. "You look the same. Tanner, healthier."

"You're the same—Gods! but I'm glad to see you again, Niror! Is your family well?"

"Splendid, doing splendidly."

Thedir swallowed at his beer. "Nothing's changed much here; not as much as I thought it would've. It's about the same—"

Niror leaned forward and asked under his breath: "What's the word, Thedir? All I've been hearing is rumors. No one at the Academy mentions a word; Father doesn't say a thing. I've been tempted to join the legions—"

"Spare yourself the trouble." Thedir slumped in his chair, drummed his fingers on the table. "It's—a civil war, for certain," he told Niror. "A year ago—I wouldn't have thought so, I'd've said it could be averted. Like we used to say. But a year out on the frontier—it's changed. Maybe not here, not tonight, not yet, Niror—but—Well, you can see their attitude." He glanced about the room. "It's changed. Soris' power is—" Thedir snapped his fingers and grinned sourly. "I don't know what the Council can do; they're keeping tight-lipped about it. But you should've seen some of the men in my outfit. Over half of them are dying for action; they'd be happy to see the revolution come. They think they hate the throne that feeds them. The damned fools—I'm just sitting back. But it's going to happen, Niror, and I feel angry about it. Look at these idiots; they complain about taxes and mismanagement, they want to destroy the government because of that."

Niror pondered it. "How soon, do you think—?" He was concerned; he sat with his folded hands on his chin, rubbed a lip with his thumb.

Thedir shrugged. "Soon. It's not—it's not something *solid*, not something you can put your hands on. Just a feeling. Things happen, they don't seem like much, but you put them altogether—Like, last year, I'd been gone about a month, right? and Lord Yevers was slain. The right hand to the throne and

he was killed—by ‘bandits.’ *That’s a lie.* Then the discovery of arms and armor in the trading vessels that pulled in from Kirsos. Spies everywhere; how many spies has King Soris had beheaded? That slave revolt in Asbar last fall. I killed three men in that one, myself.” Thedir shooed his head, drank his beer. “Names, names. . . it’s all vague. . . No one’s sure who’s *behind* it all. Not that— I mean, Orvir’s after the throne, we know that pretty well; it’s a pretty good chance he has some upset aristocrats under his belt. But then there’s this traitor the soldiers keep talking about—Bargis. Soris ran him out of the country two years ago for being in alliance with those cowards in Tol. I don’t know. . . ” Beer.

Niror shook his head. “It frightens me, Thedir. I’ll be frank with you. Every day I expect screams to come from the streets; then I’ll know it’s started. It might be a relief, in a way.”

“Captain Dures at the fort thinks that King Restiror in Tol is waiting for things to happen, too. So he can move in with troops and take the whole country— Gods! just look at the maps. Neria’s gone; Logne’s gone; Samdum and Khom—we can count Khom, hell, the throne’s worthless, there. Setom— When Csith goes—and it will, tonight or tomorrow or the next day—it’s all finished, Niror. We’re the last major kingdom in the world, the last truly strong nation, and we’re slipping, and we’re going to go—” Thedir dived his hand over the table edge and made a sound—“just like the rest of them. And all this—” He nodded to the crowded tavern. “Give it a month, or two months. Rubble. Ashes. The fools. . . ”

Niror knew it. He fingered his beard morosely. “You know what it is, Thedir, don’t you; What the priests talk about, and the sages. Sorcery. Hell—”

“I know, I know—” Thedir sat up and gestured impatiently. “I don’t want to talk about it. No one can convince me that sorcery killed Setom, and not their damned idiot of a king letting the mob get the better of him.”

“Talk to the men in the street, Thedir. The people who’ve escaped from those countries. When’s the last we heard *anything* from the northlands? Or from the far south? Nothing— My *grandfather* couldn’t remember anything happening in the northlands; and *his* father grew up in Salasal.” Niror played with his wine cup. “There must be something to all these things. Oron’s been dead fourteen hundred years by—”

“Oron!”

“Listen, my friend. For seven thousand years the hierophants have been predicting this. The ‘All-Night.’ You ought to study some of the texts I’ve had to read—not the junk the priests tell the people on holy days. This is the end of it, Thedir!” Niror said briskly, as if he didn’t believe it himself. “Aren’t you proud to be living through it?”

“If I live through it— Hell, I’m going to have nine sons!”

“Better get started. . . ”

They both sighed. There was no sense in prolonging that kind of talk. Niror glanced toward the dancers.

“Look at that bitch on the end, there,

Thedir. Doesn’t—”

“Look at that bastard over at that corner table. I don’t like the look he’s giving me.”

“Where?”

“There— See him? Son of a bitch, thinks he’s a sailor so he thinks he can stare at a royal sword like that. I’ll shove it up his—”

“I think you’re drunk, Thedir.”

“I’m not too drunk to put this sword where it’ll do some good—”

“Yes, you’re drunk,” Niror decided. “Listen, I know just the place for you. How long are you going to be in the capital?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What? I thought the military kept a tight schedule of all that; I thought you’d probably have to leave tomorrow.”

Thedir shrugged, sipped his beer and cast dour looks at the sailor in the far corner. “Even the army doesn’t know what to do, anymore.”

“Well, listen, then, let’s do this right, uh? You’ve been gone a year— There’s a splendid little den of iniquity opened up here a few months back. If you think Darzoumi *wine* is good, then listen to this—”

Thedir bent forward and Niror leaned closer and whispered in his ear. Thedir’s eyes went wide with triumphant appreciation.

“You’re lying, I know you are,” he said.

“Damn you, you won’t make *me* jealous.”

“I swear to you, Thedir—”

“Damn it, you might just be right. Come on, hurry up with that wine. I’ve got a whole year to catch up on.” He gulped his beer, sat and reflected and giggled in a silly way. “Come on, Niror!”

“Let’s go, let’s go!” He set down his cup and threw some coppers beside it, and went with Thedir to the door.

Thedir looked around a last time. “Is that bastard in the corner still spoiling for a fight?”

“No, no, no.” Niror dragged him by the arm. “Save your energy, you’re going to need it.”

“Well, I just don’t want to. . . ”

They went out into the frosty autumn night, walked to their horses. Niror whispered something and Thedir let out a huge, bellowing, drunken laugh and slapped Niror on the shoulder.

The following afternoon Thedir, still a bit groggy, secured a pass from one of Captain Dures’ aides to leave the capital and visit his father’s villa, half a league west of Csithuum. And Niror received permission from his patriarch to take a day off from studies. So they both rode out together, through the autumn fields, under gray skies, for Lord Ambrul’s estate.

Thedir’s father wasn’t there; he’d been detained in the palace for some reason. But his sister Yaslis greeted him, and ordered the servants to prepare a meal and rooms for Thedir and Niror. Then Thedir went alone into the western garden to pray in solitude above his mother’s grave; she’d died when he was a child. It was a curious gesture of Thedir’s—he who prided himself so openly on his chauvinistic militarism and tough-mindedness. Yaslis led Niror into an open courtyard and there they sat, in the cool afternoon sunlight, with wine and fruit at hand.

“And how are your studies coming?” Yas-

lis asked.

“Very well. Six months more and that’s the end of it,” smiled Niror. “Then—government service. Gods—they’ll probably send me to tutor some idiot general’s son at the end of the world.”

Yaslis grinned. “I doubt it. You’re pretty intelligent, Niror. They’ll probably keep you at the capital.”

Niror shrugged. “I’m not worried about it yet. I suppose my father can put in a good word for me.” He looked at Yaslis. She smiled and then rearranged her skirts, idly studied the garden trees for a moment. Niror admired the look of her; she was dark, like her brother, but Yaslis was really quite good-looking. He’d never mentioned it to her; he didn’t know her well enough. Perhaps Niror ought to give some thought to her, though. Speak to Lord Ambrul about marrying her, perhaps. They seemed to get along well enough. Idle thoughts, Niror told himself; she’s probably got some duke waiting for her.

Thedir returned, took a seat beside Yaslis. He poured himself some wine and asked her: “You haven’t any idea when father’s supposed to return?”

She shook her head. “He knew you were returning today. But he was called to the palace this morning. Something’s in the air, and I don’t feel right about it, Thedir. Father’s very concerned.”

“Uh-huh. Have some wine, Niror.”

“No thanks—”

“Haven’t you heard anything, Thedir?” Yaslis asked him.

Thedir frowned and shrugged his shoulders. “Rumors, that’s all. Nothing definite—” He looked around. “It’s cool,” he remarked. “I don’t remember the autumn being this cool, when I was a boy.”

Niror looked at him, glanced at Yaslis.

A servant entered the courtyard, bowed and begged permission to announce that their meal was served. Yaslis thanked him and led the men inside, into the dining chamber. Open windows let in daylight, but Yaslis ordered them some of them shut—it was too drafty—and she requested a man to light some flambeaux.

They ate their meal, roasted pheasant and cooked vegetables and sweet fruits from Lord Ambrul’s own lands, and wine from his own vineyards. Their conversation was cheery, despite the curious emptiness in the air. Perhaps it would have been happier had Ambrul himself been present. They discussed things in general and tried to steer clear of politics. . .

The meal finished, they arose with the intention of retiring again to the courtyard. The sun was going down. Yaslis was telling a servant to clear the table; Thedir was making a conversational point to Niror. There was an abrupt commotion in the corridor outside: footsteps and yells. They looked at one another. Thedir went for the door but it was pulled open from outside. A house servant stood at the threshold.

“There’s—a rider from the capital here, young lord.”

“What’s he want?” Thedir asked; he went past the servant.

Niror looked at Yaslis; she gave him a puzzled expression, unsure and anxious—

Thedir returned, the rider beside him. The

man was exhausted. Thedir pulled out a chair for him, took a wine flask from one of the women clearing the table.

"Drink it—"

The rider gulped and gasped; then, conscious of his station, he set it aside.

"Now—I'm Lord Ambrul's son, I'm Thedir—"

"Then you're the one I'm supposed to talk with, my lord."

"What's happened?"

Niror and Yaslis crept closer, all attentive.

"There's been rioting in the capital, just this afternoon. The Councillors—your father—were meeting with King Soris. Someone killed the king, and—the riot followed. There were crowds in the streets by the time I left. The Guard sent riders to the homes of every city noble, to tell their families."

"How bad is it?" Thedir asked him.

Yaslis' hands were working together.

"The Councillors were all in the Assembly Hall, they hadn't been adjourned yet. There was another riot in the barracks. The—the army, my lord. . ."

"But were any of the Councillors slain?"

The rider didn't know for certain. "The Commander of the Palace Guard asked that the families of the gentry stay at their villas, that's all. The city's not safe for them, not tonight."

Niror spoke up: "What about my father?" What about Lord Ceres?"

"Young Lord, I can't tell you for certain. I don't know. A rider's been sent to your home, though, I'm sure of it."

"But the riot's still contained in the city, then?" Niror pursued.

"I guess so—" The ride was uncertain, all he knew was what he'd seen with his own eyes.

"Don't you know who's behind it?" Thedir asked.

The rider wiped his face. "It might be Bargis. I'd heard some talk that he was in Csith, that he'd returned and was calling soldiers to him. But—I don't know for certain." He paused. "There was some other talk. . . ." He looked uneasily at the three, glanced at the servants stnading about in the dimness.

"What kind of talk?"

"About—Lord Ovrir. The High Councillor." He said quickly: "Some people are saying that he's behind it all, but I don't know anything about that; all of this is rumor, I shouldn't really be mentioning it, even. All I know for certain is what I told you, my lords. Now—" He stood up. "Please, if you'll excuse me, I've done my duty, I should return to the capital."

"If it's safe for you," Niror told him.

The rider smirked. "If you'll forgive my saying so, lord—I wear no badge of rank."

Niror nodded. Thedir led the rider to the door. "Let me lend you a horse from our stables for the ride—"

"You're very kind, my Lord Thedir—"

They went out. Niror stood silent, staring at the floor, deep in thought. He looked up, saw the servants departing in whispering groups, saw Yaslis. She was absently working her hands together, and her face was nervous and tense. Niror went to her.

"I'm going to leave now," he told her. "I can't stay here and not know what's hap-

pened at my father's estate. You understand—"

Yaslis, not looking at him, nodded. Then she turned to him. "It's not safe for you."

"The trouble's in the city, it can't have spread very far by now. I'll be safe enough. Tell Thedir—"

"Tell him yourself"—Thedir's voice.

"You'll need arms, Niror."

"I doubt it."

"You'll need a sword, at least; and a side-knife. Here—" Thedir took one from a rack, threw it to him. Niror tested its weight and balance.

"Take this scabbard for it," offered Thedir. "And here's a good knife; I killed a wild pig with it, once. You want some armor?"

"No—" Niror sheathed the sword and tightened it about him, strung the side-knife over his shoulder. "Will you lend me a fresh horse?"

"Come on—"

They went to the door; Yaslis called out:

"Niror! Ride safely, please—and swiftly!"

Niror looked at her, grinned sadly and nodded strictly to her. Then he went out with Thedir.

"We'll have to try to keep in touch," Thedir told him, as they walked the corridor to a doorway and out and through a patio to the stables. "I don't know, Niror—I think this is it. Whoever's behind it, this is it. I hope the Councillors can get out safely—"

At the stables Thedir loaned Niror one of his own personal steeds. "It rides like a devil," he warned. "But it's the fastest horse you'll ever ride in your life. Be careful, Niror."

Niror mounted, stroked his mount. "I'll be careful. I'll see if I can make it back here before dawn, Thedir. If everything's safe at the villa."

"All right. Just be on your guard, Niror. You can't trust anyone tonight, remember that."

"I'll kill anyone I see," Niror promised him with a wink; then he slapped his chest and rode off, out the gate and over the grounds toward the south.

Thedir watched him go; then in the darkening night he went inside to comfort his sister.

Chapter 2.

Niror rode swiftly. The early night would cloak him, and he was grateful that he'd worn a dark tunic, and that the steed Thedir'd lent him was a roan. For safety's sake, however, Niror galloped close to the border of the woodlands that surrounded the open fields.

He urged his horse ahead ever more swiftly; images of desperation, of slaughter and death crowded his brain and Niror became tense and weary with himself, useless though that was. As he rode he noticed far ahead of him, to the southwest, a few villas of other landed lords. But he spotted no patrols, no mobs or rioting out here. Niror glanced back once or twice to Csithuum; there was no hint, from his distance, of anything untoward, occurring in the capital tonight.

Sooner than he'd expected—his worrying had kept his mind occupied—Niror sighted

the tall white walls of his father's estate, set back on a grassy slope against the dense forestland. He hurried on, galloped through the harvested fields carelessly, travelled around to the eastern grounds and made for the entrance. It sat open and unattended. Niror reined tightly when he reached the courtyard; he looked about anxiously. He glanced at the apartments of the house proper, saw but a light or two in the windows. There was no hint of anyone about; neither was there any indication of violence or disorder, for which he thanked the gods. Relieved somewhat, Niror coaxed his horse toward the house, up the granite flags, and through the arched entrance. He dismounted and led his weary steed to one of the bricked pools set before the mansion, let it drink its fill. Then he went up the stairs and pushed open the doors.

Silence and emptiness. He called out for someone, anyone. The quiet rested about him, obscure and unbroken. Niror loosened his sword in its scabbard, stepped into an unlighted hallway. Cautiously at first, Niror went upstairs and searched all the rooms on the third and second floors; then he searched the rooms of the ground level. The villa had been abandoned. Niror sighed heartily; a thousand worries assailed him and he sought to drown them in his mind.

Realizing that he was hungry and thirsty, Niror went down a hallway and into the kitchens. He took a bottle from the wine rack and guzzled at it; he stepped into a storeroom for some bread and cheese. Then he sat at a table and, eating, meditated on things. They should have left some word for him; surely his mother and sisters would have expected him to ride through Hell to reach them. Their lack of foresight, of attention to him, pained Niror deeply; the only possible excuse could be that they were utterly desperate to escape on the very moment.

Niror sighed, let his worries run away with themselves, and finished eating. Then he gathered together some packages of cold meat, some fruits and three jugs of wine. He went from the kitchens into another room, found a blanket and loaded the food into that, tied it securely. Starting out a back door, Niror paused a moment. There was no telling if he'd ever see his home again. The riot might already have been contained; but it might be that the revolution would fan and spread like an uncontrolled inferno, and all this be swallowed up by it. He couldn't know for certain, but—

Niror set down the bundle and walked out of the kitchens slowly, savoring the memories of it from his childhood and early manhood. His mother directing her corps of servants and house attendants; the girlish laughs and shrieks of his sisters; his uncle, a proud aristocrat and thoroughly loyal to the throne, trying to argue sense into Niror's father, who was a liberal. Agony clutched Niror as he realized that all this might be swept away in one day, one night. He went down a hallway, peeked into the various rooms. He entered the room where his mother would often help the maid-servants at their spinning, cloth-cutting, sewing and dyeing. He stood still and remembered the smells and thoughts

and memories of memories of it. On a small table, nearly hidden by the shadows and darkness, Niror found one of the small rings his mother used in her tailoring. He thought to pocket it and save it as a memento; but then he decided to leave this house and the grounds exactly as they were—as he'd remember them, forever. Placing the ring back on the table, then, Niror brushed a piece of parchment beside it; curious—He lifted it, turned it toward the dim nightlight at the windows.

It was a letter, addressed to him, written in his mother's hand, telling him that they'd gone with the servants to his uncle's villa, and that he should follow if he were able. The letter was signed by his mother and sisters.

Niror's first impulse was to weep; but then a hardness took hold of him. They'd be safe at his uncle's villa; he could explain later why he hadn't followed, hurtful as their worries might be, not knowing how he'd fared. But Niror thought of Yalis and Thedir; he should return to them; he'd promised to do so.

Quickly Niror pocketed the letter, returned to the kitchens and took his bundle with him to the stables. There he took a horse he'd owned for some years, mounted it and rode free. The night about him was very still and very silent, unreal so.

On his return ride Niror studied the distant stars for long intervals. He'd been taught that man's fate lay in those stars, that the gods spoke to men though them and by them directed the destiny of man and nation and cosmos. Someday, his patriarchs had told Niror, he might learn to read the stars. Yet dark mages and sorcerers spoke of things in stars, as well. Through them—so Niror understood—these sages had prophesied the end of man and the rise of evil things. One day in the future night would fall and dawn would never break again over the cities. That would be the All-Night. All men would probably be dead by that time, the sages had promised; the stars said so.

Niror shivered in the damp cold and urged his horse onward. Passing by the distant villas he'd remarked earlier that night, Niror cursed and let out a groan. One was afire. Giant flames leapt up from it and washed dimly against the further darknesses of night. Peering closer, Niror distinguished a moving crowd of people and horses heading south from the fired villa. He swore frenziedly. He looked towards the capital, stared, and his heart sank within him. A temple in the center of the city appeared to be afire. . .

Nearing Lord Ambrul's estate, Niror could more distinctly make out details of Csithuum. Certainly at least one temple—the Temple to Tanish?—was on fire. And there appeared to be mobs at the city gates and other crowds hurrying into the fieldland. Niror rode furiously at the last and thundered into Ambrul's villa grounds, reined at the house courtyard and hurried into the mansion.

Yalis was there, frantic with worry. She was in the dining chamber and with her were two state soldiers. Niror tightened when he saw them, when Yalis ran to him worriedly and took his hands and told him that Thedir'd left soon after he had—and headed for Csi-

thuum.

"The fool!" Niror spat, eyeing the soldiers warily.

But they greeted him in amity. "My name's Arles and this is Celim," spoke one, offering Niror his arm; Niror took it. "We're friends of Thedir's. We're from his company, rode in from Csithuum. But we missed Thedir—"

"Why'd he leave?" Niror asked Yalis.

"He was impatient. He wanted to know what was happening. Oh, if he'd only waited—!"

"It's a grim story," Arles spoke up; and Niror faced him. "Your father's a Councillor, isn't he?"

"Yes, yes. My name's Niror—"

"Yalis told us," interrupted Celim.

Niror asked: "What's happened?"

"Treachery in the Council and in the army," answered Arles. "The Councillor Orvir tonight murdered King Soris—and certain other Councillors with him slaughtered the men true to the throne."

Niror went cold.

"I'm sorry, Niror—"

Niror swallowed a deep breath. He'd feared this; but he wasn't quite prepared for it. He groped for the table, and Yalis took his arm and led him to a chair. Arles handed him a well-used wine bottle. "Drink."

Niror sat there.

"I'm sorry for being the bearer of such word, Niror, believe me. But my own uncle was a minor attendant to the court and he was killed tonight, too."

Niror finished with the wine. He forced himself to steady, got hold of himself. He pushed the images of his father's murder from his mind, blanked them out, and made himself think only of what must be done now. "All right," he said. "What else?" He was staring at the floor.

"The assassination and the riot in the Palace happened first; but either the army got word of it, or else two things happened at once. In any event, the army's in revolt, as well. Bargis appeared in Csithuum tonight and the soldiers who've been waiting for him joined him and started it all. The capital this evening, Niror—it exploded like a clay jar in a fire. Gentry, soldiers, commoners—all began killing everyone else—"

Arles' fists clenched and he squirmed his jaw. He took the wine and swallowed a long draft of it. "It's been building for years, you know that as well as I do. Something happens here, something happens there—Finally, you can see a pattern, you can piece it all together—but by then it's too late. . ."

Arles quietened. Silence hung about them. Despair and fear held them, and emotions knotted up that wouldn't loosen, emotions constricting them. It was hard to breathe, hard to think.

Niror felt Yalis' hand on his shoulder; he bit into his fist, pondering, then remembered something.

"When I was riding here," he said, "I saw a plantation to the south set on fire, and a mob of people. And there was a mob heading in this direction from the capital—"

Arles sighed. "Then I guess we can't head back to the city." He drummed his fingers on the table. "Did you recognize them?"

Niror shrugged and shook his head.

"Whether they're soldiers or commoners, they'll kill us before they'll do anything." He faced Yalis. "I'm afraid, daughter of Ambrul, that they'll be attacking every villa and plantation they come to—"

"We can ride free," Niror argued.

"Perhaps," replied Ambrul, "if there's time—"

But there wasn't time. Celim called them to a window. Arles went over to him, and Niror stood up and instinctively drew his sword. Yalis kept near to him.

"It's almost dawn," noted Arles. "There's a mob of citizens coming up your fieldland—"

Yalis gasped and nearly screamed; Niror turned to her and threw an arm around her, held her tightly. He said nothing but glared at her sternly. It was enough to calm Yalis, even embolden her spirit for the moment.

"Take those blades from the racks," Niror directed, and Celim began doing so. "Yalis—is there anywhere we can stay to defend ourselves, where they can't—?"

A woman's shriek, from high in the house, carried to them. The servants.

"Gods!" Celim growled, growing furious, casting glances out the window.

"Yalis—?" Niror coaxed.

She was thinking desperately. Violently, Yalis pushed the hair out of her face. "A tower in the west wing—"

"Too late for that," Arles argued, going to the window. He tested the door, ran through the beam bolt. "Anywhere in the house—?"

Yalis grabbed Niror's hand. "Come on. . ."

They all followed her out of the dining chamber, down a corridor and into a small room off the main kitchen.

"There's a storehouse out there," Yalis said, "beyond the stables."

There was no window, so Arles opened the door a crack and peered out. There was a patio outside, and the large stables to his left. To the right, open fieldland hemmed in with a cluster of olive trees and grape-bushes.

"I don't hear anything," Arles spoke. He looked back at the others; he looked at Yalis. "Where's the storehouse?"

"Just beyond the corner of the stables—the entrance is on this side. It's in two rooms, and a door in the second room leads to a cellar—"

Above them they could hear the running and noises of the servants. Niror heard Yalis groan under her breath: "Oh, gods, gods. . ."

"All right—" Arles drew his sword, peered out once more. No noises, no sight of anyone. "Follow me."

He ran out. They saw him scamper out over the patio, over the ground and slam himself against the stable. Arles crept along it till he slid around the corner; he reappeared in a moment to signal them to hurry.

"Next?" Celim asked.

"Go ahead," Niror motioned.

Celim ducked his head and hurried out. He cleared the patio. But now you could hear dim voices, the thunder of footsteps from somewhere. Celim hit the stable wall.

"Celim!"

Celim saw them, and he ran. A wild shriek sounded out from the mob. Niror watched. Celim had nearly made it to the end of the stables when an arrow thudded against the stone before him and bounced off, shooting

sparks. Celim jumped, looked behind him, sought to dodge a second arrow by backtracking for a moment. A second arrow and a third missed him. Celim crouched to the ground and rolled; he got to his knees and sprang up, stretched, kicked to make the corner. An arrow caught him in the belly and he screamed brokenly and tumbled awkwardly. Another arrow and another struck him; one went wild. Celim's arms jerked and he hit the wall, slid low. He tried to roll, but yet another arrow drove through his head—

Niror slammed shut the door, threw down the bolt. He heard the missiles slamming against the wall outside. He gasped, looked around, looked at Yaslis.

Her eyes were cold, her lips mute.

"Where else?" Niror asked her. "Yaslis—?"

She nodded in some direction or other. Urgently Niror grabbed her arm with his free hand, tightened his grip and shook her violently. "Damn it—!"

She came to her senses. "Th—there—"

Niror arose and dragged Yaslis with him. They scampered through to the kitchen, into an adjacent room. It was small, but a low door in it led down a thin stairs to some chamber beneath the mansion. As they went down, they both could hear brutal noises in the front rooms, and shrieks from the servants.

"Will we be safe here?" Niror asked Yaslis.

Yaslis seemed perplexed, unsure of herself. "There should be another door—"

"Find it!"

His voice startled her; Yaslis remoteness left her then, and in the darkness she felt the walls, caught a latch and drew open a wooden door. She reached inside and grabbed a torch, showed it to Niror.

"Do you have flint and steel?" she asked.

Niror grunted, got them from his tunic and scraped until the torch caught, feebly. It lit their way down an extremely narrow stairs, winding and slippery, and into a deeper, smaller chamber.

"We'll be safe here?" asked Niror.

Yaslis nodded. "There's another place—here." She pushed a few old timbers out of the way to reveal a sunken well in the floor. Niror held the torch over it; it dropped down about a man's height, and was wide enough to hold them both, if it came to that.

For a moment, they sat down on the cold moist earth, huddled together against one damp wall. Niror rolled the torch on the ground to extinguish it. They listened aching for any sounds upstairs.

Yaslis whispered tautly: "Can you hear anything?"

"No. . ."

After a while Yaslis began weeping quietly, and she shivered. Niror held her closer and tighter and kissed her affectionately, to calm her.

Thedir never made it into Csithuum. As his horse approached the tall eastern gate, he could see crowds of people milling about in the open courtyard, and he noticed flames beginning to eat at some towers and temple domes deep inside the walls. So Thedir slapped his horse farther south, staying some distance from the walls and galloping swiftly

over the tramped earth surrounding the capital. There were some low trees and he weaved through those. When he came to a line of old broken wells and low stone troughs, Thedir paused to let his horse drink and munch. He searched the twilight about him. He heard the violence within the city; and then there were other noises closer by. Thedir drew his sword.

Down a wide path in a grove of fruit trees toward his left, Thedir discerned a group of riders approaching him. His fist tightened on his blade. He told himself he'd go down fighting and killing. He eased his mount back from the trough, edged into some bushes. Voices growled out and Thedir knew he'd been spotted.

"Who's there? Who is that?"

Thedir could see them slapping their horses.

"Who is that over there? Tell us or we'll kill you!"

Thedir called out: "Are you friend or foe?"

"Are you gentry or rebel?" was his answer.

Thedir felt the slow sweat dripping down his neck. "Gentry!" he yelled, and prepared to die.

The horsemen were nearer now. They didn't seem threatening.

"What's your name, man?"

"Thedir. Son of the High Councillor Ambrul."

"Thedir! Damn the gods! It's Thedir, Durres!"

Thedir lost his breath. "Is that Captain Durres?"

"Aye—" came a growl. They were by him, now, and Thedir saw that it was, indeed, Captain Durres with men of his own troop and other badged soldiers of the state.

"Put down that sword," Durres commanded him sharply. "Are you crazy to come riding out here?"

"I wanted to see what's happened— Sir—"

"Well, look! We're moving on. Your father's dead, did you know that?"

Thedir's insides went slack instantly; but he held himself up. It was like Durres to test a man's mettle by resorting to a tactic like that—

"We can't fight them by ourselves," Durres complained, leaning forward on his horse and spitting a stream. He seemed to be talking to himself, as much as to his men and Thedir. "The capital's worthless. They'll burn it to the ground. Half the farmers in my troop have sided with Bargis, the bastards. He's taken the throne, did you know that? I'd like to cut him into dog-meat— And the peasants are in revolt— Everyone's after everyone else's throat. The fools. Soris was the biggest fool—"

Thedir's voice was hard: "What do you intend to do about it?"

Durres eyed him aggressively. "Every man who still sides with the throne is falling behind his company commander. Those that haven't been killed yet are riding free tonight. Captain Lorus of the Fifth and General Mayur have already struck west for Horem. That's where every true soldier will go. And from there we'll attack the capital and nail Bargis' head to the wall—"

"What about Orvir?"

"Orvir's dead. Bargis killed him."

Thedir thought about that for a moment. He remembered what he'd told Niror just the night before; it *had* been just last night. Yes—the entire nation was collapsing. . .

"Come on," Durres ordered; "we'll ride for Horem now. If we wait any longer, the riots will break outside the city again. The others can find us."

Thedir waited. What about Yaslis? he thought. And Niror?

Durres grabbed his reins violently and stared menacingly at Thedir. Thedir frowned at him; but he kneeed his horse and followed after Captain Durres and his soldiers.

They rode west, through the dawn, into the morning, heading for Horem. They managed to gather other soldiers to them as they rode; nearly all of Captain Lusukos' troops had fought free of the rebels and were making west.

As Csithuum retreated from view Thedir took a look behind him. Dense black smoke poured up from inside the walls. And it looked as though mobs of people or soldiers were hurrying out into the field. Several villas in the distance were afire, their unsure glow wafting in the early morning sun. But his father's villa Thedir could not see.

Chapter 3.

Yaslis was sleeping fitfully, her head resting on Niror's shoulder, her body curled up tightly beside him. Niror held a hand in her hair. He, drowsy, finally snapped awake and sat with wide eyes, listening, thinking. How much time had passed? There was no guessing. He felt hungry; Yaslis would, as well, when she awoke. They'd have to go upstairs, sooner or later, to see if the rebels were still around, to see what damage had been done—to get some food and drink, above all.

Niror's leg was asleep; gently as he could he pulled it out from under him and stretched it. The numbness left it as warm prickles grew up, sharpening painfully. Niror massaged the leg. Yaslis nodded, murmured something, fluttered her eyes and woke up.

She seemed instantly to remember and realize everything.

"Have— Niror—have they gone—?"

"I don't know," he whispered. "Are you hungry?"

She bobbed her head.

Niror told her: "I've tried to stay awake all night. I think I fell asleep, but I didn't hear anything."

Yaslis yawned and shuddered. She rubbed her face and her hair. Niror looked around, his vision as accustomed to this dimness as it could be. He stood up and helped Yaslis to her feet. Without saying anything he picked up his sword and, gripping Yaslis' hand tightly, went to the stairs and took the first step. He kept his eyes on the door above, listening for any sound. Nothing. Niror took the stairs one by one, softly, slowly, till he reached the door. Then he gradually pushed it open with his longsword, and waited. Gray light, murky, struck them. Hearing nothing, Niror led Yaslis through the door and then stood there attentively.

He could smell the fumes and smoulder of an old fire. It appeared, however, that no one had come into this small room; some-

how they'd overlooked it. Niror and Yaslis went through the room, into the main kitchen.

It was a shambles. Furniture and utensils had been smashed and thrown about; food lay everywhere, half-eaten and discarded, or simply thrown against the walls. Tense and waiting, Niror led Yaslis through the kitchen. Still, all was silent. Niror cast a glance toward the ante-room that led to the stables; the door was open and the dead fumes blew in through it. They went another way.

Down a corridor, where everything had been knocked about and thrown into disorder, they came into the dining chamber. Wreckage and ruins. Yaslis sobbed; then her face tightened into an expressionless mask, drained, the eyes drifting.

All this—

They returned to the kitchen and scrounged up some edibles and devoured them, unspeaking. They couldn't find any wine, but there was a full cask of water which they broke open and drank from; then they washed themselves, as well. Niror asked Yaslis if she felt better now and she said Yes, a little.

Outside, it was dusk. The two went out onto the patio that led to the stables. Still, no sign of anyone. But the stables had been set afire and the rank stench in the air told Niror and Yaslis that not all the horses had been freed, if any of them had been. They studied the charred ruins of the stables. There lay Celim's burnt corpse; and there were bodies hanging from the smoking rafters, where the roof had caved in—

They returned inside, went through the kitchen and dining hall, went upstairs into the living chambers, all the time wary of anyone still about. The upstairs was all wreckage and rubble, as well. Goods had been stolen or destroyed, furniture damaged, closets and cupboards sacked. There was a corpse lying across one of the beds: a middle-aged woman servant with crusted blood between her thighs and a cloth tied around her head, and gaping knife-wounds all through her naked body.

Yaslis felt sick; Niror led her back down the stairs, and they sat there for a while. The desolate silence was like a heavy somber noise, unbearable.

"We can't stay here," Niror finally said in a low tone. "We can't go to the capital. If we can find a horse or two, Yaslis, what we'll have to do is ride away somewhere. See if we can find out anything—try to find Thedir, maybe, or—my family—"

Yaslis burst out sobbing, then. She cried and cried in her agony. All this— She choked and coughed in her pain and rage, the hopelessness of it all. Niror let her cry; he reminded himself of his fathers villa, and imagined that by now it looked like this. He wrapped his arms about Yaslis.

She got control of herself. She took several deep breaths and the wind rustled through her clamped teeth. Niror looked at her and saw a malevolent glow in her eyes. "I hate them," Yaslis confided to him, there on the stairway. "I hate them—"

The stairs had darkened and the hall below had dimmed with the falling dusk. Niror grimaced to himself. "I just remembered,"

he said aloud. "This is twilight. That means there was daylight today. . ."

They went down the stairs, Niror decided to make a quick search of the rooms in that wing of the mansion. Sword out, he poked his head carefully through the doors along one corridor. From one there issued the sound of comfortable snoring.

A cruel grin came to Niror's lips. Waving to Yaslis, he crept into the room. On a divan against one wall a man lay sprawled upon the pillows, wine and food spilled over him. Niror raised his blade, approached, stood above the slumberer; lifting his sword high, he drove it down through the man's chest. The sleeper awoke, gurgling, pain and shock in his eyes. He thrashed on the pillows; one arm drifted out, then snapped with frozen gestures. Blood drooled from his mouth and he made silly sounds in his throat and chest. Then he went limp, the eyes still staring. Niror yanked free his blade and fought down a frantic impulse to mutilate the corpse. He turned to go out. This was the first human being he'd ever slain in his life.

Yaslis was at the doorway. She smiled wickedly, a look in her eyes, and even when Niror took her arm and led her away, Yaslis found herself straining to look back at the dead sleeper.

They went into the kitchen and gathered together some food and filled a few skins with water, and bundled everything in a thick tapestry.

"Do you feel well enough to ride?" asked Niror.

"I feel fine. But the horses—"

"I know." Niror lifted the bundle and flung it over his shoulders. They walked through the darkening household, out the front doors and through the courtyard. Niror only hoped that the ravagers had left some horses here, or that some perhaps freed from the stables had merely wandered the grounds.

He wasn't mistaken. As the two headed out the eastern gate of the villa grounds, they spotted three horses grazing on a low hill against the deepening sunset. Yaslis called to them and the animals raised their heads. She whistled to one and called out its name.

"That mare," she pointed out to Niror, "—it knows me."

The mare approached them cautiously as they walked toward it. Niror held back as Yaslis invited the mare to her. It nuzzled her and she stroked it. It had been bridled and—Yaslis saw, with a sinking heart—brutally mistreated by some damned fool. She murmured to it, then called to Niror. Yaslis mounted, and Niror behind her; he handed her the bundle to hold onto, took the reins and asked:

"Where shall we head?"

Yaslis shrugged. "South— It doesn't matter. We don't know where Thedir went; we can't go to Csithuum. I don't know— What lies south of us?"

"Plainfields, scrub. The desert. A few cities. Gaegosh is southeast, Aman to the southwest."

"South, then. . ."

Gently Niror prodded the mare forward, and they rode at a leisurely gait away from the villa, southward, and away from Csithuum.

Three days of riding had brought Captain Durres and his legion of outcast soldiery to the gates of Horem. The city's lord, Safranos, welcomed the men and housed them in the barracks of his city troops. Officers of the rank he invited to stay in his palace apartments. And daily other soldiers entered Horem to report what they knew to Lord Safranos; and the commanders gathered in that city began to arrange plans for an attack upon Csithuum and Bargis.

Nine days after the assassination of King Soris and the fall of the capital, Lord Safranos held a martial council in his Assembly Hall. The late men-of-arms and the unseated nobles and lords of Csithuum all were invited, and they sat at plates and cups throughout a long afternoon. Durres was there, and Thedir, and Lusukos, and five other captains, one general, and a disproportionate number of sons and nephews and cousins of the overthrown landed gentry. All had a stake in seeing Bargis unthroned, his power quashed, and a new king set on the throne of Csith.

Unhappily, however, passion overran sensibility in the Assembly Hall, and the tone of the council was a dark and brooding one. The hunger for revenge on the part of most of those there overshadowed any other more competent resolutions. Durres protested loudly and impatiently against any maneuver other than his, of storming the capital as soon as possible. Bargis he wished to kill, himself. Captain Lusukos and General Mayur spoke more intelligently of uniting their homeless forces with the armies of nearby cities and thus forming a powerful confederacy against Bargis. They were shouted down. These men of steel wanted blood; tempers flared; accusations and lies rang out within the Hall; and at last the council adjourned with no resolution agreed upon.

In the days that followed Captain Durres so arrogantly and frequently swore against Lord Safranos, that some Councillors of Horem openly warned him to keep his opinions to himself, reminded him that he and his men were guests in that city, and argued for Durres to leash his furies and think practically.

Durres sulked for one day; then he contemptuously burst into the Audience Chamber and—before Lord Safranos and his Court—swore that the soldiers gathered in Horem were cowards and fools, accused Safranos of base treachery, and announced that he—Durres—would postpone his vengeance no longer. That very day he rode from Horem with his collected troops and struck eastward for the capital.

Thedir went with him. He wholly distrusted Durres, considered the captain's motives rash, and felt that his pride would certainly doom Durres and all his men. But Thedir, too, rankled at the inaction on the part of the lords and soldiers in Horem. In his breast, too, burned a building flame of hatred against Bargis, against the rebels, against any but those who swore by the old order. Nothing was to be gained in Horem; as little was to be got through Durres' instability. But for the moment at least, considered Thedir, Durres' actions and his own followed a common trail. Only later would they part—for Thedir had devices of his own.

Durres had with him about one thousand swords—suspicious soldiers eager for an enemy. But Durres was not so foolish or headstrong to attempt the capital with so small a force. He therefore employed guerilla tactics. He ensconced his men in encampments in the woodlands about Csithuum and all along the banks of the River Serir. These men would sabotage supply galleys and trading vessels; they attacked sallies of troops heading in or out of Csithuum; and they petitioned other dispossessed soldiers of the state, or wandering mercenaries, to join their ranks. Thus was Durres able to feed and arm his growing army, and pay them—with goods stolen from sailcraft meant for the capital.

As well, Bargis' own terroristic policies within the capital alienated many already sided with him, and these escaped Csithuum and fell in with Durres. The ranks swelled so that Durres had necessarily to assign certain men command over divisions of it. Thedir was one of these.

Winter began to settle over the land, bringing with it cool rains, winds, and a distemper in the air. Those lords and warriors who had sought out the protection of Horem a few months earlier, stayed there and homed there. They told themselves that they waited for Durres and Bargis to bring ruin to one another: then would they move in and rebuild the capital and set their own elected sovereign on the throne. But as the winter wore on, these schemes dwindled away and were forgotten. Comfortable in Horem, many of the men took wives or military positions sanctioned by Lord Safranós. And they seemed to worry less and less about the government at Csithuum.

The sun was dying in the west, and dusk was cool and pleasant for Yaslis and Niror. They rested their horses along the bank of an ancient dried-out river-bed; dead trees overhung them, and all about lay the wasteland of scrub and brush and—beyond—the beginnings of the desert. An empty breeze fluttered over the flatlands toward them, died out. Niror huddled down and started a fire in the river-bed, fed it with dried twigs and tufts of old grass, then took some pieces of meat from his satchel and pushed them onto stiff branches and began roasting them. Niror looked weathered and rather unkempt; his clothes were shoddy. Yaslis, weary and wearing a patchwork of raiment likewise, crouched against the sloping embankment and eyed Niror listlessly.

For nearly three months they had travelled the western and southern territories of Csith. Since that night when they'd left Lord Ambrul's villa, they had wandered constantly; they hadn't stayed at one place more than a few days.

At first, Niror and Yaslis had been motivated by love and fear—to find Thedir, and perhaps Niror's family, wherever they might be. They'd travelled the grasslands of the southeast and found no sign of anyone familiar, although they stopped in small towns and villages and inquired ceaselessly. They made their way as far east as Gaegosh when, giving up, they decided to stay there, to marry and live together and raise a family. The two felt that there was a bond between them

which nothing could sunder: Fate had thrown them together at a time of blood and fury, tempest and death—and they had survived, together. And they knew and understood one another well enough. A growing desire for vengeance took hold of them for a time; but Gaegosh was peaceful, no wars or revolutions had so far visited this city. Yaslis and Niror would stay here.

But their destiny seemed to presage dark things. Nine days after their arrival in Gaegosh, a make-shift army of soldiers and commoners, their numbers swollen with the landless residue of displaced wanderers and parasites and mercenary wayfarers, fell upon Gaegosh. They did not destroy the city; but their invasion of it reduced Gaegosh to the state of Csithuum. From it now moved forth hosts of desperate, homeless, disillusioned men and women; and Niror and Yaslis were among them.

The two could not return north, where word said that riot and disunion and violence were rampant. So they headed southwest, travelled again through small villages but settled nowhere. They visited Souros, they wandered directionless for a time—suffering but surviving—until they came to Eru, and stayed there five days, then continued southward. Perhaps, the two speculated, with winter upon them, they might cross the desert and survive and come to other lands where they could dwell in peace, without memories.

But Niror had reminded himself that there was no peace to be found in the southlands, for during the whole of his life he'd heard of what had befallen the nations and kingdoms there: the ancient shadow of sorcery, the All-Night and the black dry flames of resurrected Hell, had flowed down upon Terehem and Loksím and Kostath-Khum, Lusk and Kustaka. The only peace to be found there would be the peace of undeath. Yet there was nowhere else to go. . .

So they sat tonight, Niror and Yaslis, hardened and wearied and burned raw from their torment, but with life yet in them. Niror prodded the fire with his boot, watched the sizzling meat. Yaslis crawled over to him and finished roasting her own meal. She spoke nothing to him, and they ate soundlessly, then washed down the dry hot flavor with warm water. After watering their horses and tethering them farther up the embankment where they might feed, the two of them lay down together in the river bed, held one another close and relaxed. They thought their own private things and watched as the last of the sun slipped slowly behind the low hills and dry fields to the west.

Holding Yaslis in his arms, Niror felt her tense strangely. He rubbed his hand in her hair and whispered: "What is it?"

She didn't look at him, but stared to where the sun was dying. "I hate them," Yaslis said. "Who—?"

"Them—all of them." She lifted her hands as if to embroider the fact, but left it unspoken. Still she was tense.

Niror understood; Yaslis seethed inside. So did he. He burned impotently, raged silently within himself against the nameless figures and the unfathomable forces which had lifted them like pieces of bark in a storm

and swept them before it. The old sorrows and the pains in their memories—Niror thought sometimes that he would trade his life's spirit to elder demons, could he but for one moment recapture the old times only a few months distant: sitting in the garden at his father's estate, or listening to his temple masters elaborating some fine web of truth, or feeling a moving woman beneath him, or drinking—

He knew that Yaslis raged, powerlessly, for the personal things of her own memories, her own experience. But those things were done and past. And they hadn't slipped comfortably into the past to be recalled as ordinary memories; they had been rent asunder from their lives, the lives and deeds of a Niror and a Yaslis foreign to the Niror and Yaslis sitting in the wastelands tonight. What those things had meant were meaningless, now. All those things were meaningless now, thought Niror. Like a single thread cut in two and one length discarded, forever.

"I—hate them—" Yaslis whispered again.

"I know, I know—" Niror held her closer, so that she could sense the emotions within him, too.

There was nothing else to be done.

Now the sun had gone down. The tall heavens were all dark, sprinkled with the ancient stars. Upon a low hillock to the southwest Niror and Yaslis saw a gnarled leafless tree standing alone against the light gray of falling night. Stripped bare of what it once had owned, naked save for itself, the tree to them seemed lonely and sad and frightened and futile. Like them.

They both closed their eyes to invite slumber. Yaslis moaned tiredly and yawned. Niror, relaxing, opened his eyes a moment to glance at her, and he scanned the horizon vaguely. He stared at the silhouetted tree upon the hillock—and his breath paused for an instant.

Standing beside the tall tree was a human figure—a man, perhaps, and exceptionally tall. And apparently he stared at them.

Yaslis felt what Niror felt. She, too, stared at the figure. Her fingers tightened up on Niror's tunic. Furtively Niror's hand slipped down and reached for his sword-hilt, gripped it. The solitary figure did not move. It looked like a human shadow, almost: there was depth to it, the feel of a human being. But it stood wholly dark against the bright dim gray of the sky beyond, and that added an uncanny sense to it.

Niror grunted and rose up, and Yaslis clung to him and followed him over the parched river bed, into the wasted grassland and up the sloping of the hillock. They continued to stare at the figure, yet there was no betraying movement or reaction on his part. Approaching closer, both Niror and Yaslis shuddered to see that the man's eyes burnt with a yellow fire.

Niror thought to himself: This, then, is Death—

They halted, but twenty paces distant from the man. The yellow eyes glared at them. Yaslis, tight by him, whispered in his ear: "I trust you."

Niror called to the figure. "Who—are you—?" His voice rattled and he was ashamed for it.

The man moved a bit; the folds of a robe

showed more distinctly, a black robe. His mien did not seem so menacing. He said to them: "I think I know you. You have wandered far. Aye—I know you both, as all things are written."

Yaslis ventured in a hushed tone: "Are you—a god?"

The yellow eyes dimmed momentarily and the man's voice was somber as he answered. "I am no god, young woman. But I am an unhuman thing—"

Niror hissed between his teeth and his sword wavered.

Yet the robed man's attitude seemed far more benevolent than hurtful. His voice seemed weighted with the languor of ages, heavy with pain and tragedy far removed from the sufferings of Niror and Yaslis, yet akin to theirs. Niror and Yaslis seemed to guess it—

"Homeless are you both," said the man to them. "Outcasts in your own land and from your own race, are you. I will offer you shelter and aid, you two. See—"

He raised a robed arm toward the south. Over the wasted grasslands smothered with dry broken earth and the far sanded stretches, Niror and Yaslis saw a monumental fortress set against the deep of night. It stood higher and broader than any edifice of Csithuum; and the aura of it was darker than the darkness of deepest night. No starlight or moonlight reflected from it; it seemed to cast no shadow upon the dead earth.

"We, too, are outcasts," confided the robed man. "Come. My name is Serenthal, and I welcome you with amity and trust. Will you come to my shelter and feed and clothe yourselves?"

Waves of emotion fired through Niror and Yaslis, instinctive distrust and fear and loathing of this inhuman thing, a primordial hatred. And memories shot through them: of Csithuum, of the estate, of months of wandering. Despair and anguish, fear and desperation filled them—all emotions crowding in them and passing on, till they were left empty vessels. Alone they stood, together, in a nighted waste before a haunted wayfarer.

"We—we will go with you—" Niror agreed; and Yaslis did not object.

"It is not so far," Serenthal told them, and turned to lead them.

Exhausted as they were, Niror and Yaslis yet found the strength to follow after him. The moon rose high above and lit the far desert dunes with pools of deep shadow, highlighted the crests of the wasteland with frosty silver. Yet no light from heaven touched Serenthal, and the moon did not wash his citadel with glistenings of white shimmer.

The moon slid high against the night, began to slip low. Now the three of them were near to the citadel. It towered so high above them that Niror feared it might topple over. He marvelled that the earth could support so massive a structure. Niror stared up at it and couldn't look away; he saw three figures suddenly hurl themselves from a battlement or roof far up, and he cried out. Serenthal did not even shrug at his exclamation. And Niror saw the figures sprout wings and swoop and glide about the towers of the fortress; one darted inside a window and did not reappear.

They went up a broad long stairs made of

black basalt, walked across a veranda colonnaded with tiers of pillars, and then took another stairs and followed a pathway which led over a small bridge. Niror stared down as they crossed the bridge: below him dropped a sheer gorge filled with motionless shadows. On the opposite side Serenthal opened a small gateway and led them into the citadel, into a dark chamber and through it, and into a larger room. It was all empty, desolate and lightless.

Serenthal guided them into a vast hallway; the ceiling rose taller than any height that any noble of Csith might imagine for a palace. Inside there, the winged-creatures floated and swooped, high up. And Niror and Yaslis spotted other figures—some like Serenthal, tall and thin, others squat, all faceless and shadowed—which moved across the broad flags to disappear under archways or into doorways, or to take any of the countless stairways that led away into obscurity. There were massive torches set in the walls, and lamps hung from vaulted arches; there were giant statues and bas-reliefs set into the walls, and friezes depicting wholly inhuman montages. The flagged floor had been cut into a hieroglyphic design which only baffled Niror and Yaslis.

They were breathless with wonder and fear, in that place, and they held tight together while Serenthal took them up a sprawling stone staircase and down a dim corridor, into yet another chamber. This room was lit with flambeaux in wall-sockets, and there were tables and chairs about. Upon one table rested dishes of food and bottles of drink. Serenthal invited the two to be seated and meal.

They did so, gingerly, unsure as they were. But the food was tasty and filling, and the wine heady.

Serenthal sat opposite them, at the far end of the table. And he pulled back his cloak so that his features were revealed to the torchlight.

Niror and Yaslis gasped.

"Do not be affrighted, I beg you," Serenthal said to them. "I am unhuman. My features are human-like, you see—but I am something more than human."

His countenance was proud and stately, in a somber way. His skin was dark and glossy, his pate bald, his nose firm and straight. The eyes beneath lowering hairless brows burned with their intense yellow glare. His motions—as Serenthal clasped his hands and rested his chin upon them—were smooth and graceful.

Niror asked him: "Are you a—sorcerer, Serenthal?"

Serenthal made an expression akin to a smile. "You might refer to me in that fashion," he allowed, "though sorcerers are mortal and human. I am simply an inhuman. Sorcery is an inhuman thing—"

"Are we your victims, then?"

Serenthal lifted his head from his hands and his eyes dimmed for a space. "No," he answered proudly, and shook his head once. "You are here because I invited you. You are not 'victims,' young man. If you wish, you may leave any time. But I think I sense your minds. You may stay here as long as you wish. If you like, I will train you in the

ultramundane arts.

"Young man— What are your names?"

"I'm Niror. And this is Yaslis."

Serenthal nodded. "I know your mind, young Niror. You have grown to see your age and heard tales of sorcery and monsters, and you have heard your priests and prophets foretell a time when shadows shall cover the earth and mankind made into dust. The fear of that grips you when you look on me, does it not? Aye—I am an inhuman, Niror, Yaslis. I do not make a practice of inviting clay creatures into this abode of the other world. But walking as I was tonight, out under the eternal skies, and seeing you two, and sensing what you were about— You know how there is a kinship between a man and a dog? or a man and his horse? Perhaps there is that vague kinship amongst our spirits, as well. I am an unhuman of spirit and mind; I have existed as flame and fog, water and animal. I am animal, now. You are too human, in your flesh, but in your dispossessed spirits, perhaps, dreams of elsewhere, visions where humankind has no place—perhaps these burn in your hearts, somewhere.

"I do not want you to hate me or distrust me, any more than you hate or distrust your fellow men, despite their farragoes of insolence and madness, pride and lust— These things mean little.

"Finish your meals, please. Then I will introduce you to things." Serenthal arose, looked away from them, looked back. "You met me tonight. You met me in the night," he said meaningfully. "That is an omen. Sometime night will fall and never again will the clear dawn rise. The shadow of sorcery is falling upon the places of men. It does not happen in a day, or a year. In the old days, when Taisakul put us down to Hell and drove us to the distances of the lands—that took him many years, and the gods aided him. Those gods all are perished, now. The stars are theirs no longer. I know that your Csithuum is fallen; that it should fall, was written eons ago. That you two should come here, was written eons ago. Exhausted in body and spirit as you are, hating and loving a treacherous mankind as you do—still, you enter this abode of old things, this place as ancient as the first dawn—and I welcome you here.

"The night had dropped over the southlands and the northlands and it shall fall upon Csith. All the continent shall rest in the All-Night, soon. But even that is not the end of it. More is written than we shall witness, more than even the stars shall witness. But—are you finished? Then rest—"

Serenthal lifted a torch from the wall and moved over the floor, showed where a large bed sat against a wall. "Lie here," he invited them, "and sleep till you awaken—"

Niror and Yaslis, achingly aware of their tiredness and soreness, did so. Serenthal left them, placing the torch in the wall as he went out. Whether by some magic of his or because of their own fatigue, Niror and Yaslis sank immediately into a dreamless slumber, fast and deep.

The exciting conclusion of David Smith's epic tale of intrigue and sorcery will be featured in CHACAL No. 2.

HANNES BOK:



ARTIST AND MAN

by BEN INDICK

After one has said everything, there is still more to be said. We cling to a near-forgotten memory, trying to recall a springtime glow, a brush with a spirit quite beyond our own capacity to emulate or even to understand. We marvel at it in retrospect, and try to capture some of the nuances of a free spirit, which are prismatic, and ever-changing, ever-renewing. We can only marvel, and be grateful for an enriching moment. This is to me the memory of Hannes Bok, whom I knew for some eighteen years, from 1946 until the time of his death. I have already written twice of him¹, rueful in the knowledge that I had allowed the last ten years of his life to pass without visiting him once. I have reexamined old memories, have studied biographies of his life, have looked again at his art, in this period of renewed interest in Bok, the Artist.

And, there *is* always something new to be said. Because I was privileged to know him, he is not only the Artist to me, but the Man. The free fantasy of his art, in its beauty and its slapstick and even its sentimentality, was part of the man himself. I would like to share some of each, in terms of a man named Bok and in terms of our personal friendship.

Bok was born as Wayne Woodard in 1914 in Kansas City.² His boyhood was spent, however, in Duluth. He was close to his mother, who lived separately from his father, one of the reasons he was to change his name. As a youngster, trying to earn pennies in the Depression years, he was already drawing, reading, both insatiably to make up for the drawing lessons he could not afford. He soon found favorites in each field, none more than the airy fantasies of Maxfield Parrish in art, and the lush, sensual fiction of A. Merritt. These loves would persist throughout his life, and influence his style and his tastes. It is well known that he copied Merritt's nov-

el, *The Metal Emperor* in longhand from its many installments in Gernsback's early magazine, *Science and Invention*, unable to afford purchasing the copies, and that he was a frequent correspondent of the older artist. It is often assumed that Bok was literally a student of Parrish; however, Parrish wrote after Bok's death³: "Our mutual contacts happen to be very few; about all I knew of him was through a long list of letters, so that he seemed to be a character from fiction, albeit a very real one." In any event, the influence is evident, although Bok's finest work rises above these stylisms. His fondness for cats and mice must date from these early years as well, and he would use them as signatures later in his letters, as well as frequent characters in his art.



Hannes Bok circa 1959

As a teenager of 17, he moved to Seattle, having now renamed himself Hans Bok (the "Hannes" would come even later. A Scandinavian background may account for the name he chose; he did not like it tampered with, and when I once referred to him as "Hank," he severely reprimanded me.) When he had accumulated a portfolio, he hitchhiked across the country to New York, and tried in vain to arouse interest in his work. He would retrace this path several times in years to come, until he finally settled in New York. In 1937 or 1939, Emil Petaja, who had already become friendly with Bok through a mutual friend, Harold Taves, induced the artist to move to Los Angeles. Here he took Bok to meetings of the local science fiction society, where he met, among others, a young Ray Bradbury. Later⁴ Bradbury recalled his pleasure in knowing Bok, that he was "fascinating, good fun, mysterious" and that his own response to Bok's art was "joyous (even) manic." He captures his persona when he writes: "I think that is where we shuffle the men from the boys in art and writing. Those people who are going to become dull men do so. Those of us who will remain essentially boys do so with one helluva yell." By this definition, both Bok and Bradbury would always be "boys," to the world's delight. Bradbury took a portfolio of Bok's work to New York, to various editors, John W. Campbell, Jr., Mort Weisinger, Leo Margulies, and, successfully, to Farnsworth Wright. The magazine which had brought to the public the works of Lovecraft, Smith and Howard, *Weird Tales*, was the place of Bok's first professional appearance. His work would now begin to appear in various fantasy and science fiction pulps, after this Dec. 1939 appearance. In 1940, he illustrated a children's book, *Dwinkle the Dwarf*, and possibly a se-



"The Piper"

quel, by Midge Kelly.

The pay for the pulps was very low, as little as \$5 for a b/w, and occasional covers in color could bring \$75. Even at this stage, Bok's unwillingness to be tied to schedules and deadlines plagued his professional promise, just as, later, stacks of letters from many correspondents took up much of his time. Nevertheless, a coterie of Bok-fans was growing, and editors came to him. August Derleth recognized his talent quickly, and Bok did the jacket for the third Arkham House book, Clark Ashton Smith's *Out of Space and Time*. Frank Belknap Long's *The Hounds of Tindalos* followed. Bok's original is done in finely muted color tones, but Derleth could not afford a color jacket yet.⁵ However, subsequently, the great editor used his own funds to reproduce in color two Bok masterpieces for Howard's *Skull-Face and Others* and Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland*. They were returned to Bok and graced the picture-laden walls of his apartment for many years, where the inadequately reproduced Hodgson cover could be appreciated in its genuine beauty. This would be his last work for Arkham House. However, he was also busy in 1943-4 with a series of color covers for the house publication of the Ciba Pharm-

aceutical Co., *Ciba Symposia*.

After the end of World War II, he was busy doing wrappers and interiors for several of the specialty fantasy publishing houses, including Prime Press, Fantasy Press and Shasta. Most of the Fantasy Press covers are for the most part Parrish-like landscapes with somewhat incongruous small rocketships perched within. However, for Shasta, he produced a series of covers rich in action fantasy uniquely his own.

Editorial deadlines and paltry pay for the pulps continued to disenchant him, and, in addition, coincident with the decline of the pulps in the fifties, his eyesight began giving him difficulty. His November 1963 wrap-around color cover for *Fantasy and Science Fiction* was a belated pulp appearance; other interests had begun to occupy the mercurial artist. He found a personal pleasure in creating white plaster face masks of his friends and guests; on the walls, they offered a counterpoint to his brightly colored paintings. An old love of astrology blossomed at this time into a practical source of income. "Managed to do book jackets (color)," he wrote me, "for Llewellyn (occult firm) Publications reprints of Dion Fortune's *Secrets of Dr. Taverner* (writ about 1910, of a Jules de Grandin

type Weird Tales stuff)." In addition, he did other occult books, as well as the same firm's magazine, the January 1964 cover for *Minute Scope*. The latter is a weird mixture of the fey with the masochistic, a double portrait of a woman in a suspended cylinder, a "witch's cradle" used for ESP tests, one such enclosed by four enlarged wristwatch straps. A nude could well have come from the brush of a Bok a decade earlier. In addition, he was casting horoscopes for paying customers.

Then, with stunning abruptness, in April 1964, the fantasy world and Bok's numerous friends were shocked to learn he had died of a heart attack, only fifty years of age. His last years had been filled, as ever, with letters to and from his friends, sometimes only on major holidays, such as when he sent Christmas cards he had designed himself. (On one such, he wrote to me, for my deary in writing, "So, nu?" utilizing a New Yorkese Yiddish.) In those years, he had seen his fantasy friends less often, due perhaps to his absence from the pages of fantasy books and magazines. Ray Bradbury had not seen him since 1951; Gerry de la Ree had last seen him in 1962; I had not visited him since 1952. He was buried in a simple plot in upstate New York, "within sight of a 'Maxfield Parrish'



tree."6

Many old friends have written of Bok since his death, and the portrait is remarkably consistent, that of a man of light and an open heart, with a quick wit and gentle warmth. I shall return to one of those summer days when I chose to visit him. It would be unannounced, since I was scarcely presumptuous enough to schedule an appointment, and had no way to reach him by telephone. He had no need for a phone, and indeed, it would only have invaded his privacy. There would be times when he would not even answer a knock at his door, being immersed in work. It was the chance one took in visiting him, and a not inconsiderable one, for he lived in a rundown rickety walk-up on 109th St., off Central Park West, on the fifth floor. It was a Hispanic neighborhood, where garbage cans lined the curb, and children and adults chattering in Spanish eyed all newcomers. Bok's own neighbors and friends were a diverse mixture of ethnic and racial types. I trudged up the endless steps and finally, breathless, knocked at the door. I see him opening it, an aureole of white hair around his youthful face, and his quick smile of welcome. He never simply walked; he seemed to bound about, even in his later years, when he had become heavier, from eating oatmeal all day, he explained, unable to afford a more balanced diet. It was a frustrating experience to get him to speak of himself; he wanted to know everything about his guest. Surrounded in the large old room, sweltering in the summer, by his paintings and masks, a bathroom whose toilet dripped continually, a bed in one corner, his desk in another, he perched, squatting hands on knees on the desk, and had to know *everything* which might be new. What, I wondered, could be interesting in *my* uneventful life, when all I wanted was to learn more about this man whose art had given me so much pleasure. It would not do. He must talk about his guest. He would, of course, happily discourse on his favorite composer, Max Steiner, whose movie scores for *King Kong* and *She* he would play on rare and worn recordings. He laughed off the inadequate—if any—pay he had received from the short-lived new Collectors Group which had published his completions of two Merritt fragments, and preferred to discuss astrology. He hinted that the names of his private clients would astonish one, but refused to reveal their names. Invariably, I would tour the "gallery," the walls of that one room, crammed with his art, longing to have something by him, and too unsophisticated to offer to buy. He was not eager to sell any, and whenever he did part with one, insisted on a price commensurate with its worth. To my hints, he responded with advice I have long since accepted, that one only appreciates that which he has worked for. He was, in spite of this, profligate with the quick cartoons with which he embellished his letters. Since these usually concluded with smiling mice, I once gave him what might seem to some a grotesque gift. At college, I had for a time a girlfriend, one of whose acquaintances did animal dissections. His own strange sense of humor led him to encase the small skeletons in plastic, and through her I obtained the not quite denuded skeleton of a mouse



Preliminary rough for "The Piper"

thus perpetuated. I cannot recall whether I was relieved or delighted when he accepted this grim momenti mori with pleasure.

He had cast my own horoscope as well, sometime in the fifties, discerning, he said, that I had ahead of me a memorable career in the theatre. I am certain it was only coincidence when I did try my hand at playwrighting in the early 60s. The commercial theatre has survived well without me, but I was fortunate enough to win several prizes and have the plays staged. Hannes was gratified, but unsurprised. "Since I'm way ahead of my times," he wrote me, "I'm chafing, because I'm waiting for tix to your FIFTH B'way play. Get a wiggle on!" When my first play was put on in Philadelphia, a children's play I called *Ice Cream in the Soup*, I used a theatre poster as a giant postcard and mailed it to him. He was delighted with the surprise the card occasioned in the postoffice where he picked up his mail, and the title reminded him of the "time in youth when [I] went to collect buddy to go downtown, but he was just finishing lunch, so had to wait. His mother opened a pot of jam and dumped it into a dish—I thought for spreading bread—but no, she then dumped a lot of CREAM on it, and my pal ate this as dessert. Glaah!... Wonder what ICE CREAM SOUP was about (eating is very important in kids' stories, so the title is sure-fire)—with music too. Bet it was a ball!... So get a hustle-on, and turn out s'more plays, preferably to be put on in this here area."

As it turned out, the only play which we would attend together had been on an earlier occasion, Barrie's *Peter Pan*. When Peter begged the audience to save Tinker Bell by applauding its belief in fairies, Hannes' vociferous applause, cheering and footstomping threatened the safety of the balcony!

If I had longed in vain for an original, the time was to come when I would have one. It took a marriage to do it, and it cast a temporary shadow on our friendship. Hannes did not attend my wedding, nor was he ever to meet Janet, but as a wedding gift, he generously sent the humorous and characteristic drawing herein reproduced. It had first appeared in print as an illustration for "Jitterbug" by R. R. Winterbotham in the June 1941 *Stirring Science Stories*. It was new to me, and I was captivated by its weird figures, so completely Bokian. Unfortunately, my

wife was less than captivated. An artist herself, in the abstract medium, she considered it grotesque and even ugly. I was naive enough to report back to Hannes that she did not care for it, but that I loved it. One might as well tell a mother that her baby was ugly. He politely suggested that he would replace it with an abstract drawing, and included a copy of such a piece, wherein the sheet was filled with luminous globes such as he would sometimes populate space scenes. I responded at once that I had no desire to exchange it at all, that I considered it wonderful, and the matter was dropped. However, I felt that I had done a most ungracious thing to a real friend, and waited until I might offer some sort of redress. It took three years for my wife to become accustomed enough to my precious, lone Bok to allow me to frame it. In the meantime, our first son had been born. Hannes and I had not referred to the drawing in all this time, and I did not wish to bring it up again, so, to demonstrate how it had finally become a part of our lives, I had my wife photograph me, in Dec. 1956, proudly holding my son, a typical father and



son snapshot which anyone might send. However, there was one difference. Behind my son, then a year and a half old, the framed drawing is clearly evident. I cannot recall now how Bok responded, but I think he maintained a discreet silence. Recently, through the kindness and generosity of my friend and fellow-admirer of Bok, Gerry de la Ree, I obtained Bok's original sketch for the drawing, and I am enabled to offer it as a fascinating example of the artist's approach, his instinctive grasp of the scene as he envisioned it, and the changes he made to effect a perfection and harmony of parts. My wife, seeing this sketch, instantly suggested it be framed separately and displayed prominently.

There was to be one more original for my "collection," and I unearthed it with genuine joy while preparing this essay. It was included among my papers in 1963 within my last letter from Hannes, a whimsical little sketch, typical of his vibrant sense of humor, immensely precious to me in this third decade after we had chatted in that old room. Recalling my longing all those years ago for something in his hand, he inscribed it as shown.

Was it perhaps a reference to the photograph I had sent him, and his own good-natured and satirical response?

In 1962, when my son was already 7 and my daughter 4, he wrote: "Doesn't seem possible your kids are all THAT old. O where has tempus fidgeted? Ye gods, one of these days you'll look in mirror and find a grey hair, and Janet will shriek and find a wrinkle!!!... Meanwhile, hope all's okey-dorey out yonder, & feed the kids something to stunt their growth so I can see 'em while they're STILL kids—lest a procession of adult strangers walks in and informs me its your grandchildren!!!!!"

And now my son is 21 and my daughter is 18; I have a beard with grey strands, while Janet has grown accustomed to a few, just a few, wrinkles. But the memory of my friend, whose joy and enthusiasm graced my more mundane life, is ever young, welcoming me ever and again into that dismal but glorious flat of yesterday. □

1. "The Remembered Elf," in *And Flights of Angels*, Emil Petaja, edit., Bokanalia Memorial Foundation 1968; "Yiggitzers: A Memory," in *Bok, A Tribute to Hannes Bok*, Gerry de la Ree, edit., Gerry de la Ree Publ. 1974

2. Biographical information has been supplied principally by the publications above, and particularly Emil Petaja's complete and beautiful memoir.

3. Parrish's letter is reproduced fully in *Luna*, Number 4, 1965.

4. From *Hannes Bok: A Remembrance*, by Ray Bradbury, published by Bokanalia Memorial Foundation, 1967, accompanying their Bok Folio 2.

5. Taken from a letter written by August Derleth to Gerry de la Ree, and quoted in *Bok, A Tribute to Hannes Bok*.

6. Quoted from *Hannes Bok*, by Jack Gaughan, in *And Flights of Angels*. I would also like to acknowledge gratefully C. W. "Ned" Brooks' invaluable "The Hannes Bok Checklist," T-K Graphics, which brought to my attention Bok's work for the Ciba Pharmaceutical Corp.



SING A LAST SONG OF VALDESE



Illustration by Jeff Easley

by KARL EDWARD WAGNER

I. The Girl Beneath the Oak



reverence! Hold up a moment!"

The burly priest drew rein in a swirl of autumn leaves. Calloused fingers touched the plain hilt of the sword strapped to his saddle, as his cowed head bent in the direction of her call.

Raven black hair twining in the autumn wind, the girl stepped out from the gnarled oaks that shouldered the mountain trail. Bright black eyes smiled up at him from a wide-browed, strong-boned face. Her mouth was wide as well, and smiled.

"You ride fast this evening, reverence."

"Because the shadows grow deeper, and I have a good way to ride to reach the inn ahead." His voice was impatient.

"There's an inn not more than a mile from here." She swayed closer, and he saw how her full figure swelled against her long-skirted dress.

The priest followed her gesture. Just ahead the trail forked—the left winding alongside the mountain river, the right cutting along the base of the ridge. While the river road bore signs of regular travel, the other trail showed an aspect of disuse. Toward this the girl was pointing.

"That trail leads toward Rader," he told her, shifting in his saddle. "My business is in Carrasahl."

"Besides," he added, "I was told the inn near the fork of the road had been long abandoned. Few have cause to travel to Rader since the wool fair was shifted south to Enseljos."

"The old inn has lately been reopened."

"That may be. My path lies to Carrasahl."

She pouted. "I was hoping you might carry me with you to the inn yonder."

"Climb up and I'll take you to the inn on the Carrasahl road."

"But my path lies to Rader."

The priest shrugged thick shoulders beneath the cassock. "Then you'd best be going."

"But reverence," her voice pleaded. "It will be dark long before I reach the inn, and I'm afraid to walk this trail at night. Won't you take me there on your horse? It won't take you far from your way, and you can lodge the night there just as well."

Shadows were lengthening, merging into dusk along the foot of the ridges. The declining sun shed only a dusty rubrous haze across the hilltops, highlighting tall hardwoods already fired by autumn's touch. Streaked with mist, the valleys beyond were swallowed in twilight.

Night was fast overtaking him, the rider saw. He recalled the warnings of the villagers miles behind, who for his blessing had given him food and sour wine. They had answered his questions concerning the road ahead—then warned him to keep to the trail if night caught him, and on no account make camp by himself. The priest had not been certain whether they warned him of robbers or some darker threat.

His horse stamped impatiently.

"I could make it worth your while to ride out of your way."

There was witchery in her voice. The bodice

loosened, parted across her breasts.

"Though I can't see your face, I can see there's a man beneath that priest's cassock. Would you like to enjoy a mountain flower tonight? You'll remember her sweetness when you grow old in some musty temple."

Her breasts were firm and well-shaped. Against their whiteness the tan flesh of her nipples matched the color of the swirling oak leaves.

Whatever his interest in her, the priest carried gold beneath his robe. The girl's eagerness to draw him onto a little-frequented trail aroused deep suspicion.

"The lure of wanton flesh is nothing to a priest of Thoem," he intoned.

"Then bugger yourself!" she spat and lunged with a shrill scream for the horse's face. Sharp claws raked blood across his nose.

Already nervous, the horse screamed and reared. Caught by surprise, the priest lost stirrups. Cassock flapping about his limbs, he scrambled for balance—then was thrown from the terrified mount. He fell heavily, somehow landing half on his feet—cursed as his ankle turned under him.

The rearing horse bolted down the trail, took the right fork toward Rader, disappeared. With mocking laughter, the girl ran after.

Limping badly, the priest stumbled after her—cursing with blasphemous invective. But the darkness quickly swallowed the flash of her white legs, though her laughter taunted him invisibly still.

II. The Inn by the Side of the Road

The lights of the inn were smoky yellow through the thick, leaded panes. The night winds caught the smoke and smell of horses, drove it down the road to Rader—so that the priest came upon the inn all at once.

He noted the many horses tethered in the outlying stables. There were a number of travellers at the inn tonight, and it seemed less likely that the girl meant to lead him into a trap. Or had her confederates lain in wait along the trail, probably they were content to steal his horse and gear. The priest swore angrily, deciding he had been too suspicious.

His ankle stabbed pain, but at least it bore his weight. His boots had probably prevented worse injury. He damned the voluminous grey cassock as it flapped about his trousered legs. It was slit front and back from ankle to mid thigh, and while that enabled him to straddle a horse, he blamed the clumsy garment for his fall.

The two storey square log structure was a welcome sight. The autumn night grew chill; mist flowed like waves across the ridges. A night spent in the open would be uncomfortable at best. Worse, he had been warned of danger, and his sword was strapped to his saddle somewhere in the darkened hills.

A sign hung over the door: Vald's Cove Inn. The carving seemed of recent work, the priest noted as he limped up to the door. The latch was not out, though the hour was not late. Hearing voices within, he knocked loudly.

He was about to knock a third time, when the door was opened. Light and voices spilled

out into the night.

A narrow, beardless face frowned out at him from the half-open doorway. "Who... What do you want... reverence?" His voice was thin and nervous, and he spoke in half whisper.

"Food and lodging," the priest rumbled impatiently. "This is an inn, I believe."

"I'm sorry. There's no more room. You'll have to go elsewhere." He made to close the door.

The priest's huge fist checked him. "Are you a fool! Where is the innkeeper?" he demanded, suspicious at the man's show of anxious confusion.

"I'm master here," the other snapped in annoyance. "I'm sorry, reverence. I've no more room, and you'll have to..."

"Look, damn you!" The priest's bulk shouldered onto the threshold. "My horse threw me, and I've hobbled for miles already to get here. Now I'll have food and lodging if it's no more than floorspace near the fire!"

The skeletal innkeeper did not quail before the bigger man. His narrow jaw clamped in anger; he clenched his black gloved hands.

"What is this, man?" demanded a voice from within. "Do I hear you denying lodging to a brother servant of Thoem! What manner of innkeeper are you!"

The innkeeper started, then cringed effusively. "Forgive me, eminence. I only meant that my accommodations were not sufficient for one of his reverence's..."

"Let him in, you idiot! Turn away a priest of Thoem, would you! I see it's true how sadly you mountain folk have fallen in your respect for the true god! Let him in, do you hear!"

The priest pushed past the suddenly solicitous innkeeper. "Thank you, eminence. The manners of these folk are pitiable."

There were several people in the common room of the inn. Seated alone at one of several small tables was a tall, thin man whose scarlet cassock identified him as an abbot in the priesthood of Thoem. Like the priest, his face was hidden by the cowed garment. He waved to the other man with a finely groomed, blue-veined hand.

"Come join me by the fire and have some wine," he invited. "I see you're limping somewhat. Did I hear you say your horse threw you? That's bad luck. Our host must send his servants out to find it. Are you badly hurt?"

"Thoem saved me from serious harm, eminence—though I'd rather not walk another mile on it tonight."

"I'm certain. More wine, innkeeper! And hurry with that roast! Would you starve your guests! Sit down here, please. Have we met? I am Passlo, on my way in the service of Thoem to take charge of the abbey at Rader."

"A pleasure to meet you, Eminent Passlo." The priest touched hands as he seated himself. "I am Callistratis, journeying in the service of Thoem to Carrasahl. I've heard the abbey at Rader has fallen to the Dualists in these evil times."

The abbot scowled. "Certain rumors have reached us in the South. Word that there are certain rebel priests in the northern provinces who would contend that Thoem and Vaul

are but dual expressions of the same deity. No doubt these heretics consider it prudent to align themselves with the god of these northern barbarians, now that the empire drifts into civil war."

The priest poured wine, drank hunched forward so that his lips were hidden in the shadow of his cowl. "I have heard such attempts to vindicate the Dualist heresy. It may be that our errands are the same, Eminent Passlo."

"Well, Revered Callistratis, that doesn't surprise me. I'd sensed immediately that there was a presence about you that argued for more than the simple priest. But I'll not intrude further on one whose mission requires that he travel incognito. But tell me, though—how would you deal with the Dualists?"

"By the prescribed formula for any heresy. They should all suffer impalement, their bodies left for night beasts and carrion birds."

The abbot clapped him on the shoulder. "Splendid, Revered Callistratis! We are of one accord! It pleases me to know that those who believe unswervingly in Thoem's sacred precepts have not all passed from the priesthood! I foresee a pleasant evening of theological discussion."

"Come, revered gentlemen—don't judge too harshly. After all, there is precedent for Dualism in the history of your priesthood."

A short, stocky gentleman with a fine grey beard looked gravely at the priests. He straightened from the fire where he had stooped to light his pipe. A silver medallion embossed with a university seal depended from a chain about his thick neck.

"Precedent?" the abbot snapped.

The short man nodded through a puff of smoke. "Yes. I refer to the dogma formalized under the reign of King Halbros I that Thro'ellet and Toluvin are but dual identities of the evil principle. No one in the days of the monarchy considered such doctrine heretical, although ancient beliefs plainly ascribe separate identities to these demonlords."

The abbot paused to consider. "An interesting point," he conceded grudgingly, "although the manifold embodiments of evil are certainly acknowledged by our doctrine. Nonetheless, your argument does not hold in this instance, for there is but one true cosmic principle of good, whom true believers worship as Thoem. May I inquire, sir. . . ?"

The greybearded gentleman blew smoke in a flourish. "I am Claesna—of the Imperial University at Chrosanthe. Your proposal of the theological debate caught my ear, eminence. The prospect of intelligent discussion promises salvation from what I had previously feared would be a dull evening in a backwoods tavern. May I join you?"

"Claesna?" The abbot's tone was surprise. "Yes, I've heard a great deal of you, sir. Please join us! Why does a scholar of your high reknown pass through these dismal mountains?"

Claesna smiled acknowledgement. "I'm headed for Rader myself, actually. I've heard of certain inscriptions on what are said to be prehuman ruins near there. If so, I'd like to copy them for study and comparison with others that I've seen."

"So it's true that you plan to supplement

Nentali's *Interpretation of Elder Glyphics*?" suggested the grey-cowled priest.

Claesna lifted a bushy eyebrow. "*Supplant*, not *supplement*, Revered Callistratis. Well, I see you are an extraordinarily well-informed man yourself. This *does* promise to be an illuminating evening."

"Oh, please, learned gentlemen," mimicked a sneering voice from the corner. "Don't bore us all to death with such learned discourses."

"Shut up, Hef!" A gruff voice cut him off. "You'll find a neater death than boredom when we get to Rader!"

The other made an obscene reply. An open fist slammed on flesh, then sounded the clash of chains, subdued cursing.

"Ranvyas, you son of a pox-eaten whore, you busted that tooth half out of my head. Takes guts for a pissant bounty hunter like you to bust a man all chained up."

"You had an even chance before the chains went on, Hef," growled Ranvyas. "And you won't need that tooth once I get you to Rader."

"We'll see, Ranvyas. Oh, we'll see, won't we. There was other smart bastards all set to count their bounty money, but ain't one of them lived to touch a coin of it."

Claesna indicated the two men in the near corner. One was a tall, lantern-jawed swordsman with iron-grey hair, who wore the green tunic of a ranger. The other, his prisoner, was a wiry man with pinched face and stained yellow beard, whose blue eyes seemed startlingly innocent for one weighed down with wrist and leg irons.

"That's Mad Hef over there, whose black fame ought to be known even to you, revered sirs. Looks harmless enough, though I doubt all the prayers of your priesthood could cleanse his soul of the deeds he's committed here in the mountains. They were talking about it when you came in. The ranger finally tracked him to the cave where he laired, and if he succeeds where so many other brave men have failed, the public executioner at Rader is due for a strenuous afternoon."

From the rooms above came the echoing moan of a woman in agony.

The priest started from his chair—halted half-crouched when none of the room's other occupants seemed to pay heed.

Again the cry of pain ripped through the panelled hallway above, down the narrow log stairway. A door slammed at the foot of the stairs, muffled the outcry.

Two other travellers exchanged glances. One, grotesquely fat, shrugged and continued to devour an apple pastry. His smaller companion shuddered and buried his chinless face in his hands.

"Pray Thoem, make her stop!" he moaned.

The fat man wiped slobbery lips and reached for another pastry. "Drink more wine, Dordon. Good for nerves."

Passlo's hand pulled at the priest's arm. "Don't be alarmed, Revered Callistratis. The merchant's young wife is giving birth upstairs. No one thought to mention it. As you see, the father is untroubled. Only his brother seems a bit shaken."

"The fat blob is a half-wit!" sneered Claesna. "I judge his mind is rotten with pox. I pity his wife, poor child. If our host

hadn't sent a serving girl to stay with her, these swine would certainly have left her to labor alone."

"The mystery of birth," quoted the abbot. "Where pain is joyful duty."

Now the innkeeper moved among them, setting before each guest a wooden trencher and a loaf of black bread. Behind him walked a swarthy, bristle-bearded dwarf—the first servant the priest had noted in the inn. His squat, powerful arms carried a great platter of roast meat, which he presented to each guest that he might serve himself as he desired. The fat merchant growled impatiently when the dwarf halted first before the abbot and his two table companions.

"Please, Jarcos!" his brother begged. "Don't offend these revered sirs!"

Hef giggled. "Don't eat it all now! Save a nice hefty bone for poor toothless Hef!"

From overhead the screams, distant through the thick boards, sounded now at closer intervals.

The innkeeper smiled nervously, wrung his black-gloved hands. "I'll bring out more wine, Bodger," he told the dwarf. "Bring out your mandolin and play for them."

The dwarf grinned and scuttled into the back rooms. He cavorted out again in a moment, wearing a flop-brim hat with a feather and carrying a black stained mandolin. His strangely pointed fingers struck the strings like dagger tips, and he began to caper about the room—singing comic ballads in a bullfrog voice.

The moans from upstairs continued monotonously, and soon the travellers forgot to listen to them, or to notice when they ceased.

III. "Do You Know the Song of Valdesse?"

"Then, just as the hunter spun around at the sound, the werewolf leapt down from the roof of his cabin! He clawed for the silver dagger at his belt—but the sheath was empty! Too late he remembered the old man's warning! And as he died he saw that the beast at his throat had the sun-colored eyes of his wife!"

Claesna leaned back against his chair and blew smoke at the listeners circled about the fire.

"Bravo!" squealed Jarcos, the fat merchant. "Oh, that was good! Do you mean that the werewolf was really his wife then?"

Claesna did not deign to reply, instead nodded acceptance of the others' applause.

The meal was a scattering of picked bones and cheese rinds. The autumn night tightened its chill around the inn, where inside the travellers shared the companionship of wine and warm fire. The hour grew late, but no one yet sought his bed. Pulling chairs in a rough circle about the glowing hearth, they had listened to the ballads of Bodger the dwarf, and as the night wore on someone had suggested that each tell a story.

"The mountains of Halbros seem haunted with all manner of inhuman fiends," Dordon remarked with a shiver. "Jarcos, why did you insist we make this journey to Rader! You know the wool market there has been dead for years."

"My astrologer agreed this was a wise ven-

ture. Let me worry about our business, little brother." Jarco's contrived to shape his roll of chins into a resolute expression.

"Not only 'inhuman fiends' to watch for," Ranvyas commented, jerking a gnarled thumb toward his prisoner. "Up until two days ago there was Mad Hef here. Thoem knows how many poor travellers he's waylaid and murdered. Had a favorite trick of crawling out onto the road all covered with blood and moaning he was one of Mad Hef's victims. Too damn many good-hearted folks left their bones in the rocks for mice to nest in. And I'd as soon forget if I could some of the things I seen back in that cave where he was laired."

Hef snickered and shook his chains against the post. "Got a special niche for your skull there, Ranvyas dear. Old man like you should've brought help along, stead of trying to sneak after me all alone. You just too brave for your..."

Ranvyas raised his fist; Hef broke off in an angry mutter.

"There have been human monsters in these mountains worse than this carrion-eater," the abbot said.

"Oh? Do you know this region, eminence?" asked the innkeeper, who had joined them at the fire.

"Only from my learning. I dare say that the old provinces of the Halbros kings have figured so prominently in our history and literature that all of us know some tale of their mountains—though we are all strangers here."

He glanced around at the others. "Perhaps you observed the stone ruins that crest the ridge along the gap ahead. Quite striking against the sunset, I thought. That was the fortress from which Kane held these mountains in thrall for a hundred years. He ruled the land with a bloody fist, exacted tribute from all who passed through, fought back every expedition led against him. Some say he had made a pact with the forces of evil by which they granted him eternal youth and victory in return for the innocent blood he sacrificed each dark of the moon."

"For awhile he aided Halbros-Serrantho in the imperial wars, but even the great emperor sickened of Kane's depravity, and finally used the combined armies of the new empire to pull the tyrant's citadel down on his head. They say his evil ghost haunts the ruins to this day."

"A tale somewhat garbled by popular superstition," Claesna remarked. "Actually the legend of Kane has far darker implications. His name, I have observed, reappears in all ages and all lands. The literature of the occult recurrently alludes to him. In fact, there is an ancient compendium of prehuman glyphs that Kane is said to have authored. If it exists, I'd give a fortune to read it."

"A rather long-lived villain, this Kane," said Passlo drily.

"Some occult authors contend that Kane was one of the first true men—damned to eternal wandering for some dark act of rebellion against mankind's creator."

"I doubt Thoem would have damned a blasphemer to immortality," scoffed the abbot. "Doubtless his legend appeals to certain evil types who take his name for their own."

"Then they steal his physical appearance as well," Claesna countered. "Legend describes him as a man of powerful build, seemingly a warrior in his prime years. His hair is red and he is left-handed."

"So are many others."

"But his eyes are his mark. The eyes of Kane are blue, and in them glows the mad gaze of a ruthless killer. No man may look into Kane's eyes and not know him."

Ranvyas started. "There's talk of an assassin who's behind these murders that are pushing the empire into civil war. Said to be an outlander brought in by Eypurin to remove those who oppose his false claim to the throne. His name is reportedly Kane, and what little is known of him answers to your description. Did this Kane die in the fall of his citadel?"

"Why, of course... I suppose. Yes, he must have. That was centuries ago, man!"

"I had been warned against staying the night in the open," suggested the priest. "While nothing definite was said, I can see that these mountains have more sinister legends than the road has turns."

"That's so, Revered Callistratis," affirmed the ranger, running a hand over his short-cropped hair. "You say you lost your horse on the trail? Lucky for you you didn't meet Valdesse while you was limping along in the dark."

"Valdesse?"

"A lamia, reverence," explained the innkeeper. "A most beautiful spectre, Valdesse is—and most malevolent. Legend says she haunts the mountain trails at night. Entices travellers into her arms, and leaves them bloodless beneath the moon."

Suddenly it had grown very quiet. Leaves rustled against the frosted window panes.

The innkeeper sensed the unease of his guests. "Had you not heard that legend, gentlemen? But I forget—you're strangers here, all of you. Still I thought you must have heard her song. Do you know the Song of Valdesse?"

He raised a black-gloved hand. "Come out, Bodger. Sing Valdesse's Song for our guests."

The dwarf scuttled out of the shadow with his mandolin. Bowing to his audience, he began to sing—his voice comic no longer.

*In the dark hills of Halbros' land,
There dwelled a lovely maid—
The brightest flower, the rarest jewel,
Shone dull in Valdesse's hand.*

*Her father's inn stood beside the road,
Great was his wealth of gold—
But the choicest treasure of the land,
Was the heart of fair Valdesse.*

*Then came brash suitors to her door,
Six bright and bold young men—
Said they had come to win the hand,
Of the maiden called Valdesse.*

*'Sirs,' she said, 'don't think me cruel,
For I love another youth—
He must be gone for seven long years,
To study in a hidden school.'*

*And when she told them the suitors
laughed,*

*'Oh, your beauty is not for him—
Choose instead from one of our band,
And not some wizard's fool.'*

*Then came her lover in a cloak of grey,
Returning from the hidden school—
Said 'I've been gone these seven long
years,
Now I've come for the love of Valdesse.'*

*'Oh, no,' swore the suitors in jealousy,
'You'll not steal our prize'—
And with cruel knives they took his life,
And the heart of Valdesse after.*

*Now Valdesse lies in the cold, cold
ground,
And her spirit haunts these hills—
But her lover was sworn in the Grey
Lord's name,
To serve seven times seven years.*

"That's terrifying!" breathed Dordron, when the dwarf stopped singing. "So uncanny an ending, that last verse!"

"Perhaps the last verse hasn't been written," the innkeeper suggested. "Bodger, see how things are upstairs. It's grown strangely quiet up there."

"Well, at least we servants of Thoem have nothing to fear from lamiae!" muttered the abbot stoutly. "Do we not, Revered Callistratis?"

"To be certain eminence," the priest assured him. "Thoem protects his servants from all creatures of evil."

Passlo suddenly drew a crystal-hilted dagger from the folds of his cassock. "And for added protection in these shadow-haunted hills I carry with me this sacred blade. It was shaped from star-metal by priests long dead, and the runes on its blade give it power over evil's foul servants." He did not add that he had stolen the blade from abbey vaults.

"Seven years in a hidden school," mused the priest. "That can only mean one thing."

Claesna nodded. "He was apprenticed to the cult of the Seven Nameless—and sworn to the Grey Lord."

"Thoem grant that we may someday see the extinction of that black cult of devil worshippers!" growled Passlo.

"The cult is far older than your own religions," Claesna informed him. "And it isn't devil worship, strictly speaking."

"Well, they're devils they worship!" Jarco's said shrilly.

"No. The Seven Nameless are elder gods. Or 'proto-gods' more accurately, since they exist beyond the ordered universe of good and evil forces. Their realm is one of timeless chaos, a limbo of unformed creation and ultimate dissolution—opposite forces that somehow exist simultaneously."

Claesna preened his beard. "Their entire worship is structured on the energy of opposing systems. Little is known of the cult, since its devotees worship in secret. New initiates must study seven years in a 'hidden school' to master the secret powers of the cult—then each is sworn to one of the Seven for the space of forty-nine years. The names of the Seven are secret, for should the uninitiate utter them he would evoke the god without having power over him. A rather

hideous fate, it's said. Korjonos was sworn to the Grey Lord, who is the most feared of the Seven."

"Korjonos? Was that the young wizard's name?" the priest inquired.

Claesna bit his pipstem testily. "Yes—I believe so. After all, the ballad was based on true events. Happened a century ago, I believe."

"Not at all," corrected the innkeeper. "Not quite fifty years ago. And very near here."

"Indeed?" Dordron's voice was strained.

"In fact, at this very inn."

The eyes of the travellers bored back into their host's smiling face.

"Why, yes. But I forget you gentlemen are strangers here. Would you like to know the story behind Valdes's Song?"

No one spoke. He went on as if there were no tension in the room.

"Valdes and Korjonos were childhood lovers. She was the daughter of one of the richest men in Halbroson, while he was the son of a servant at his inn. They were both barely past ten when Korjonos was orphaned. Penniless, he left the inn to study at a hidden school—and vowed to return for her in seven years, with the wealth and power that his wisdom would bring him.

"Valdes waited for him. But there were others. Six coarse young louts from the settlements close by. They lusted for her beauty and more for the gold she would inherit. Valdes would not have them, but they argued and waited—for the time was near when Korjonos had promised to return.

"And after seven years he did return. To their brutish anger, Valdes's love for the young wizard had not diminished with time. They were married that night at her father's inn.

"But hate was black in the hearts of her rejected suitors, and they drank long into the night."

A log burst apart in a shower of sparks, cast light over the circle of nervous faces.

"The guests were gone; her father they slew with the few others who were there. They took his gold, and they dragged the lovers from their wedding chamber.

"They hung Korjonos between two trees. Valdes they threw to the ground.

"He'll not curse us," said one; and they cut out his tongue.

"He'll not cast spells against us," said another; and they cut off his hands.

"Nor seek to follow after us," and they cut off his feet.

"Then they cut away his manhood and told her, 'He's not fit to lie with.'"

"And they cut away his face and told her, 'He's not fit to look at.'"

"But they spared him his eyes so that he might watch what they did to her, and they spared him his ears so he might listen to her screams.

"When they were finished... she died. Korjonos they left hanging. Then they divided the gold and fled, each choosing a separate path to follow. And while the infamy of their deed shamed the land, not one of them was ever punished."

"Korjonos?" asked the priest.

"Did not die. He was sworn to the Grey

Lord for seven times seven years, and death could not claim him. His familiar demon cut him down, carried him away. And the rage of the sorcerer waited years upon painful years for fitting vengeance to transpire."

A chair crashed as Claesna leapt to his feet. "Gods! Don't you see! It's been near fifty years, and our faces and names were otherwise! But I thought several of your faces seemed familiar to me! Don't deny it! It's no coincidence that all six of us have returned to this inn tonight! Sorcery has drawn us here! But who...?"

The innkeeper smiled in secret mirth as their startled voices shouted in protest. He crossed over to in front of the fire. Still smiling, he peeled off the black gloves.

And they saw what manner of hands were grafted to his wrists.

With these hands he dug at the flesh of his face.

The smiling lips peeled away with the rest, and they saw the noseless horror that had been a face, saw the black reptilian tongue that lashed between broken teeth.

They sat frozen in shock. The dwarf entered unnoticed, a tiny corpse in his hairy hands.

"Stillborn, master," he snickered, holding by its heels the blue-skinned infant. "Strangled by her cord, and the mother died giving forth." He stepped into the center of their circle.

Then the chill of the autumn night bore down on them. A chill greater than that of any natural darkness.

"Seven years times seven," hissed Korjonos. "So long have I plotted for this. I've shaped your lives from the day of your crime, let you fatten like cattle—let you live for the day when you would pay as no man ever has paid!

"Callistratis," he called aside, "this isn't for you! I don't know how you came here, but go now if you still can."

Faces set in fear, they stared at the wizard. Invisible bonds held them in their places about the circle.

Korjonos chanted and gestured. "Holy man, evil man. Wise man, fool. Brave man, coward. Six corners of the heptagon, and I, a dead man who lives, make the seventh. Contradicting opposites that invoke the chaos lords—and the final paradox is the focus of the spell: an innocent soul who has never lived, a damned soul who can never die!

"Seven times seven years have passed—and when the Grey Lord comes for me, you six shall follow into his realm!"

Suddenly Ranvyas sprang to life. "The dagger!"

The abbot stared dumbly, then fumbled at his cassock. He seemed to move at a dreamlike pace.

Hissing in rage, Korjonos rushed into the incantation.

Passlo clumsily extended the dagger, and the ranger was faster.

Tearing the dagger from Passlo's trembling fingers, he hurled it for the grinning dwarf.

Bodger shrieked and dropped the stillborn. Reeking smoke boiled from his chest where the crystal hilt protruded. He reeled, seemed to sag inward upon himself, like a collapsing coat of mail. Then there was only a charred

greasy smear, a pile of filthy clothes—and a hairy spider that scurried away to vanish through a chink in the wall.

"Well done, Ranvyas!" Claesna gasped shakily. "You've slain his familiar, and the spell is shattered!"

He sneered at the wizard. "Unless, of course, you've another 'damned soul who cannot die' who can complete your incantation."

Korjonos' bowed shoulders signalled his defeat.

"Let's get out of here!" blubbered Jarcos. His brother was weeping mindlessly.

"Not until we slay the wizard," growled Ranvyas.

"And set me free," Hef advised. "I don't think you'll want me to tell them in Rader about my five old comrades."

"Thoem! It's cold!" chattered Passlo. "And what's wrong with the light in here!"

The priest broke into their circle, bent over the pile of seared clothing. They thought he meant to retrieve the enchanted dagger, but when he straightened he held the still-born child in his left hand.

His cowl fell back. They saw his red hair.

They saw his eyes.

"Kane!" screamed Claesna.

Korjonos shouted out syllables that formed another name.

Hands went for futile swordhilts, but already the room was heavy with the sweet dust stench of ancient decay.

At the doorway behind them the bolt snapped with rust; boards rotted and sagged, crumbled into powdery dissolution. They stared in dread understanding. On the threshold stood a tall figure in a tattered cloak of grey.

Kane turned his face.

And the Grey Lord lifted his mask.

Kane shook the darkness from his mind. He started to come to his feet, then almost fell because he already stood.

He was standing in the gutted interior of a log building. The floor overhead had collapsed, as had the roof, and he could see stars in the night sky. Small trees snagged up through the rotting debris. The inn had been abandoned for many years.

The air was musty with decay. He stumbled for the doorway, thought he heard the snap of dry bones beneath his boots. Outside he breathed raggedly and glanced again at the sky.

The mist crawled in wild patterns across the stars. And Kane saw a wraithlike figure of grey, his cloak flapping in the night winds. Behind him seemed to follow seven more wraiths, dragging their feet as if they would not follow.

The another phantom. A girl in a long dress, racing after. She caught the seventh follower by the hand. Strained, then drew him away. The Grey Lord and those who must follow vanished into the night skies. The girl and her lover fell back in an embrace—then melted as one into the mist.

Kane's horse was waiting outside the ruined inn. Kane was not surprised, for he had recognized the girl in the mist. His heels touched the horse's flanks, and Kane vanished into the mist as well. □

CROSS WINDS

by DAVE McFERRAN

A recent letter from Byron, suggesting that I become UK correspondent for CHACAL was not to be ignored. Particularly since—in return for my co-operation—I was offered the use of a dozen nubile Scandinavian air hostesses, a case of fine Burgundy and a considerable amount of money. I wasn't in a position to refuse an offer like that, so then: *Crosswinds* is the result!!! I decided on the title of *Crosswinds* because, after reading this "stimulating survey all that is new in British and European fantasy publishing," you'll probably think that all of this is just a load of flattery from the other side of the Atlantic. Seriously, if the publications which I write about are not of interest, I trust that you'll all write to Byron and let him know exactly which areas of fantasy you'd like me to concentrate on in future columns. But, onwards!

In addition to being Vice President of the British Fantasy Society, (Of which more is detailed later on.—Ed.) the ex-editor of the fantasy magazine *Balthus* and a celebrated inebriate who has been known to cut his toenails in bed, Jon M. (Moamrath?) Harvey is the leading light of the newly formed *Spectre Press* whose first two productions—*Lovecraftian Characters* and *Cthulhu*—have recently caused a considerable amount of favorable criticism. *Lovecraftian Characters* is a limited run of Jim Pitts' artfolio of six beautifully stippled illustrations—*Night Gaunts*, *The Call of Cthulhu*, *The Terrible Old Man*, *The Outsider*, *The Music of Erich Zann* and *Innsmouth*—contained in a decorative folder with a biography of HPL by Professor Dirk W. Mosig and an appreciation of Jim Pitts by the aforementioned "Toenails" Harvey. I'd recommend *Lovecraftian Characters* as an absolute bargain for the \$4.00, including postage. *Cthulhu—Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* is a slim little booklet of two Mythos-related tales which sells for \$1.00. I quite liked Andy Darlington's story, *Baptism of Fire*, but I got the impression he used his semi-New Wave presentation merely for effect. The other selection, *Harold's Blues* by Glen Singer struck me as being the more immediately appealing and by far the stronger of the pair. The tale itself reminded me of an old Son House interview I once heard, where, in a rambling, sorrowful manner, Son House got to telling the story of how blues guitarist Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil, just so that he could become the best, most expressive blues guitarist in the world. Yes, I would rate *Cthulhu* as being worth a read, as well. The Jim Pitts illustration for *Harold's Blues* is so out-of-character that it alone is worth the price of the booklet.

Future *Spectre* projects include more *Cthulhu* booklets, a 10,000 word story (*The Coming of the Voidals*) by Adrian Cole, whose *Dream Lords* trilogy published by Zebra seems to be selling well in the States, and a collection of fiction and poetry (again

illustrated by the prolific Jim Pitts!) by the extremely under-rated Gordon Larkin called *Flowers of the Night*. One of the few really honest fantasy publishers around, *Spectre* is a concern which I think deserves to be supported. Their American agent is Dirk W. Mosig, Dept. of Psychology, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Ga. 31709.

Ireland's *Imrryr Press* (OK, Dave... let's watch this kinda stuff. You shouldn't plug your own stuff! Uh, while I'm here, I'd like to say a word or two about the George Barr/Conan poster we're doing... Ed.) has recently finished negotiations with artist and fictioneer, Jim Fitzpatrick (whose *Celtia* will soon be published in the USA) for a large and comprehensive production entitled *Nuada Airedlamh and Other Stories*. In addition to the first publication of the entire Airedlamh comic strip, the volume will feature four illustrated and inter-connected Sword and Sorcery/Celtic mythology stories including Fitzpatrick's weird and stirring *Night of the Demon* and *The Obelisk of Doom*. *Nuada* is scheduled for January 1977 but *Imrryr Press*' S&S zine, *Vadghagh*, is already nine months overdue, so I wouldn't be too surprised if their schedule breaks down once again.

Neville Spearman continues to bring out some excellent fantasy and horror reprints. Their new catalogue lists such gems as *The Necronomicon*—an exhaustive volume of data on Abdul Alhazred and his fabled work. Researched by Colin Wilson and George Hay, with contributions from Sprague de Camp, Angela Carter and Dr. Christopher Frayling, *The Necronomicon* is scheduled for October 1976. Of prime interest to collectors will be Spearman's *Weird Tales—A Facsimile of the World's Most Famous Fantasy Magazine*, which is to be edited by that experience anthologist, Peter Haining. This volume contains facsimile reproductions of the actual *Weird Tales* format. The collection contains work by, among others, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, August Derleth, Seabury Quinn, Algernon Blackwood, Manly Wade Wellman, Henry Kuttner and Robert Bloch. The price of this item will be 3.25. The two other Spearman issues which may be of interest are *The Fiery Angel* by Valeri Bruissov—a book which has been described as "one of the most remarkable novels ever written on the subject of magic and witchcraft" and *The Manitou* by Graham Masterson—a really spine-chilling story in which the spirit of a long dead Indian witch-doctor vampirises the body of a young girl to give itself new life. Definitely not for the squeamish—in fact, our literary correspondent, Alphonse Truss, relates that *The Manitou* contains an absolutely breath-taking scene wherein the hero, with eyes bulging and every muscle strained to the limit, tears a menu up in a Chinese restaurant!

As well as handling many rare and o. p.

items (for instance, his latest catalogue lists an autographed Lord Dunsany volume) George Locke is editor-in-chief of Ferret Fantasy—a fantasy press specialising in producing some classy reprints, e.g., the recent *The Raid of 'Le Vengeur'* by George Griffiths. George tells me that, for February 1977, he has planned a reprint of two elusive William Hope Hodgson volumes, *The Calling of the Sea* and *Voices of the Ocean* in a single volume. In order to ensure the best accompanying artwork possible, George has, in conjunction with the British Fantasy Society, organized an art competition. First prize will be

25. All entrants must be either BFS members or contributors to the society's two publications, the *BFS Bulletin* or *Dark Horizons*. Final date for registration in the contest will be September 26th and the closing date for submissions is November 29th. Full details can be obtained from Jon Harvey, 37 Hawkins Lane, Burton-on-Trent, Staffs, England.

Fans of French fantasy art will be interested to know that *Metal Hurlant* 7 is now available. This quarterly art magazine seems to improve with every issue and regular contributors include such notables as Druillet, Jean-Pierre Dionhet de Gal, Moebius and Rich Corben. If you don't read French, don't worry—most of the appeal of *Metal Hurlant* is in the visuals and their colour reproduction is quite superior. Still on the subject of French artists, a new Phillipe Druillet book (supposedly a sequel to his grotesquely beautiful *Urm Le Fou*) and a collection from Moebius will be available over here within the next few weeks. I'm not too sure about the Moebius book, but having been completely freaked out by Druillet's *Elric*, *Loan Sloane*, *Delirius*, *Vuzz*, *Urm* and *Yragael*, I am personally panting with anticipation. (All these comic novels will be/are available from Bud Plant, Box 1886, Grass Valley, Calif. 95945.)

Crosswinds wouldn't be complete without a word on Michael Moorcock. Moorcock seems to be a busy man nowadays; after a lukewarm reception to his *New World's Fair* album, the rumour is that he is currently organising a new record with his group, *The Deep Fix*, and is writing some new material for *Hawkwind*. Where in hell does he find the time? There has been a spate of Moorcock material recently released in the UK. For example, there's a new comic adaptation of *Stormbringer* published by Savoy Books of Manchester—a very large sized production of Jim Cawthorn illustrations selling for

1.00. I personally don't rate Cawthorn among the great fantastic artists, but some of his larger drawings in *Stormbringer* do have a certain strange forcefulness. Savoy has already commissioned a follow-up called *Hawkmoon*. The first edition of Moorcock's latest *Elric* novel, *A Sailor on the Seas of Fate* (to be published by Quartet) still hasn't seen the light of day, although it was supposed to be out last March. *Moorcock's Book of Mar-*

tyrs—a short story collection worth the price for a single story titled *A Dead Singer*, which is a disquieting tale about the consequences to an individual due to the reincarnation of Jimi Hendrix—is now on sale for 50 pence. Also available are reprints of *The Land Leviathan*, *The Bull and the Spear*, and the first publication (in paperback) of *The Lives and Times of Jerry Cornelius*. Unicorn Books of Wales, who issued such fine Moorcock booklets as *Elric: The Return to Melniboné*, *The Jade Man's Eyes*, and *The Distant Suns*, are currently in receipt of a new Elric manuscript but, as of yet, no publication date has been set.

Robert E. Howard is another guy who is currently enjoying a tragically belated resurgence of popularity in the British Isles. Panther Books are publishing *Skull Face Omnibus* in three paperback volumes. The first of these, with a suitably grotesque cover, is currently on sale—with volumes two and three expected soon. Maybe I'm a bit on the reactionary side, but I tend to see this multi-volume set as a merely financial ploy. Panther could've easily made *Skull Face* into a two-volume set, but it seems fairly obvious that their greed, in the face of a vastly lucrative heroic fantasy market which seemingly can't reach the saturation point, forced them to aim for a quick buck by spreading the anthology a bit thinner. Unfair to the public, but who's to stop them? Still on the subject of REH, a small publishing house, based in Amsterdam, calling itself the Real Free Press has recently brought out a comic strip adaptation of *Red Blades of Black Cathay*. It's a fair enough production, although the artwork—executed by an individual known as "El Gringo" (rumour has it that his real name was formerly Herbert Measles)—veers from the highly proficient to the incredibly inept. However, for the serious REH collector, the Real Free Press version of *Red Blades* is definitely worth a glance. Address is Real Free Press, Oude Nieuwstraat 10, Amsterdam, Holland.

John Murphy and Willy Derra of Belfast's Appletree Press tell me of a new edition of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Derra describes Appletree's version as the first authentic, complete edition that has ever appeared. Apparently, *Gulliver's Travels'* initial publisher—for political/sociological reasons—heavily edited the manuscript which had been left (anonymously) on his doorstep late at night. Swift later claimed that his creation had been "basely mangled and corrupted in the press" and personally corrected a copy of the first edition in the page margins. This corrected example of *Gulliver* now resides in Armagh Library and is the basis of the new publication. The book is extensively appended and introduced by Colin McKelvin and contains a number of extremely nice stipple drawings by Jim Millar. The volume is due to be published in October/November 1976, the limited edition to retail at 3.95.

Although it is no longer strictly a fantasy fanzine, *Wordworks* (edited by Michael Butterworth, whose excellent *Time of the Hawk-lords* will soon be ready for US publication) should be of interest to a number of you. Typeset and lavishly produced, *Wordworks* 7 is currently ready for distribution (at 75

pence a copy) from: Michael Butterworth Productions, 10 Charter Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, England. In addition to an interview with Sinclair Beilies (who collaborated with William Burroughs and Gregory Corso, as well as others) there's *The Abdication of Queen Elizabeth II* by Heathcote Williams, famed inventor of the Geriatric Fuck Therapy; poetry from Lord Buckley, M. S. Weincoff, and Terry Gregory, and *Memoirs of a Metaphysical Swamp Rider* in which Andy Ravensdale examines *A Universal History of Infamy* by Jorge Luis Borges. However, the really strong point in *Wordworks* is its design and artwork. There's a very strange (semi-pornographic, shall I say?) folio by Jim Leon and some nice stuff by Dave Britton and Bob Jenkins. Some might argue that *Wordworks* is more of an underground, alternative magazine—but then it all depends on what your definition of fantasy is. For my part, I'm convinced that *Wordworks* is one of the most important and purposeful publications currently available. You'll do yourself a favour if you subscribe.

Now, for the curious among you, here's a list of forthcoming UK fantasy books and fanzines:

Wolfshead (Panther), *The Dark Man* (Panther), and *King Kull* (Futura) all by REH; *Quest of the DNA Cowboys* by Mick Farren—some of you may remember that Mick once played guitar for The Deviants, possibly the worst rock and roll band in the world—(Mayflower); *Stained Glass World* by Ken Bulmer (N. E. L.); *Dragonquest* by Anne McCaffrey (Sphere); *The Demon Lover* and *The Sea Priestess* by Dion Fortune (Star); *Kuldesak* by Richard Cowper (Futura); *Over the Edge* edited by A. Derleth (Arrow); *Twilight of Briareus* by Richard Cowper (Futura); *Tolkien's World* by Randal Helms (Panther); *Jumbee and Other Voodoo Tales* by Henry S. Whitehead; *The Black Beast and Other Voodoo Tales* by Henry S. Whitehead (both by Mayflower); and *Magician Out of Manchuria* by Charles G. Finney.

Last but not least comes *Anduril* 6 (40 pence from John Martin, 101 Eskdale, Tanhouse 5, Skelmersdale, Lanes, England) will soon be ready with articles by Fritz Leiber and McFerran. A special issue of *Dark Horizons* will soon be available with a spotlight on the work of Brian Lumley. Contents will include fiction by and an interview with Lumley... write *Dark Horizons*, c/o Steve Jones, 33 Wren House, Tachbrook Estate, London SW1V 3QD for more information. (On this and all other inquiries, please enclose a self-addressed envelope for best results—Ed.)

Well, there's been a summer lull in publishing, so there wasn't all that much news this time around. I'll try to do better in the future.

OUR MAN IN BELFAST

Dave McFerran is a young fantasy fan located in Belfast, Northern Ireland. When CHACAL was merely a glint in your editor's and publisher's eye, Dave was sending voluminous letters of comment about REH: LSF, then told us that he'd be happy to give us any British news that he could.

(Continued next page)



Rogues In The House/The Frost Giant's Daughter by Robert E. Howard
illustrated by Marcus Boas
\$15.00

Now Available From
Donald M. Grant
Publisher
West Kingston, R. I. 02892

The Devil In Iron
by Robert E. Howard
illustrated by Dan Green
\$15.00



"A brief McFerran biography. Well: Age 26, red-haired, blue-eyed, left-handed Irishman (*Good Lord... it's Kane!*) with a passion for fantasy, music, a modicum of strong liquor and receiving letters from attractive schoolgirls. (*It should be explained here that Dave is President of N. I. P. P. L. E. S.—National Institute for the Preservation and Protection of Little English Schoolgirls. Please send all contributions to this worthy cause to Dave McFerran, c/o this magazine.—Ed.*) I was formerly a runner and athlete and one-time guitarist with a group bearing the amazing name of Thunderguts Bungalow. I've been told I look like a cross between Robert Redford and Omar Sharif in a certain kind of light... unfortunately, it has to be almost pitch dark before I'm mistaken for either of these guys."

Despite all this, Dave will be bringing you an installment of *Crosswinds* in each and every issue of CHACAL.

Frank Frazetta fans and film memorabilia collectors alike will be pleased to hear that the celebrated artist has been approached to do the posters and advertising art for Dino de Laurentis' new version of *King Kong*. It seems fairly sure that Frazetta will take the commission; if so, it is rumored that he will be doing several line drawings of the giant simian for various promotional products of an undisclosed nature.

Karl Wagner tells us that Coronet Books of England has purchased the entire Kane package, including the extremely rare *Darkness Weaves*. Plans call for the first book to be released in April/May 1977 with the others to follow on a roughly bi-monthly schedule. Meanwhile, back in the U. S., Karl is putting the final touches on a new Kane novel for Warner Paperbacks, which is titled *Dark Crusade*. The book will sport a cover by Frazetta, which was completed before the actual story.

A new fanzine devoted to Michael Moorcock and his literary creations is currently in the planning stages from Tim Hewitt, Rt. 2, Box 414, Myrtle Beach, S. C. 29577. Tentatively slated for a September release, the first issue will include fiction by and an interview with Moorcock, as well as artwork by Jim Cawthorn. Write Tim for more details.

For fans and scholars of weird fiction, *Whispers* is an indispensable publication. Stuart Schiff puts together an excellent mixture of fiction, articles and artwork each time and manages to snag work from the top names in the field: Manly Wade Wellman, Karl Wagner, L. Sprague de Camp, E. Hoffman Price among others. Although he is behind schedule due to his recent move to Texas, Stuart assures us that *Whispers* No. 9 will soon be in print. For more information, write Stuart Schiff, *Whispers*, 115 Victor Street, Apt. 3, San Antonio, Texas 78209.

The BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY is currently undertaking a membership drive for American members. This worthwhile and interesting group of Limeys do such things as present the August Derleth Memorial Award for Fantasy each year, publish three journals (one of them a bi-monthly newsletter) and just have a general good time. For more information about joining this group, write to

U.S. News

Dave McFerran, 105 Beechfield St., Newtonards Road, Belfast 5, Northern Ireland. In this Bicentennial Year, it's time for a little "hands across the waters"—so get those cards and letters flying. Enclose a self-addressed envelope and reply coupon for quickest results.

Cue the drum roll and adjust the spotlight—are you holding onto your seats? Brace yourself for a shock because *Nickelodeon* No. 2 is ready! (Would someone pick up the fainting subscribers, please?) Expertly laid out between color covers by Jim Thomas and George Barr are articles and fiction by such celebrities as Jack Dann, Tom Monteleone, Grant Carrington, Howard Waldrop, Tom Reamy and literally an army of others. Issue no. 2 also features the return of fandom's nude centerfolds—two this time, one male and one female. You owe it to yourself to pick up a copy and learn why everyone's talking about *Nickelodeon*. Available for \$2 from Nickelodeon Press, 1131 White, K. C., Mo. 64126.

The Mylos Press (Box 5246, Spokane, Wa. 99205) has just released a full color poster by Boris Vallejo titled "The Green Princess." Measuring 17 X 22, the print is definitely one of the most attractive pieces of fantasy art to come down the pike in quite some time. A limited number of copies are available from the Mylos Press at \$3 plus 75c for postage.

Ready for mailing from Jonathan Bacon (Box 147, Lamoni, Iowa 50140) is *Fantasy Crossroads* No. 9. Featuring fiction by Saunders, T. C. Smith, Bertin, REH, Coplin and others along with illustrations by Day, Caldwell, Huber, and Corben. *F. C.* looks to be another winner. Also sporting lengthy news columns and letters pages, the 'zine is well worth the \$2.50 cover price—be forewarned, the last issue went o.p. in less than three months time!

Without fear of contradiction, it can be said that *Locus* is the publication to go to for news concerning the sf and fantasy fields. Described as "indispensible" and as "the life-line to what's going on," *Locus* wings its way to its subscribers monthly, featuring everything from reviews, to surveys, to notes on sf people. Even the pros check with *Locus* for the release dates of their books from the various publishers—shouldn't you? Available from Locus Publications, Box 3938, San Francisco, Ca. 94119 at a subscription rate of 15 issues for \$6.

Also supplying up-to-the-minute news and reviews on the field is *Tales From Texas* (2515 Perkins St., Ft. Worth, Tex. 76103. \$3 for a one year sub.). Published by Bob Wayne and edited by Lewis Shiner, this

monthly newsletter always has a lot of interesting content and some nice features by Shiner, Bill "I Am Moamrath" Wallace, an occasional piece of fiction and Bob Wayne's review column. Texas fans find it indispensable—others will find it of great interest.

Mark Frank's yearly gift to sf/horror fans is an excellent magazine, *Photon*. Containing coverage on the films of the past year, plus news about things to come, *Photon* stands in the front ranks of genre film fanzines. The latest issue is available for \$1.50 from *Photon*, c/o Mark Frank, 801 Avenue C, Brooklyn, N. Y. 11218.

And, before we forget it, there's a new George Barr poster on the market—a 14 X 20 reproduction of the "dragon" painting from Grant's *Red Nails* book. In beautiful living color, yet. To order, send \$3 (plus 50c postage) to: Nemedian Chronicles, P. O. Box 186, Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66201. (And for those Barr fans out there—YES, there will be other posters in this series. The next one is CONAN THE CONQUEROR, due out in December/January 1977.)

Famed composer/musician/showman Rick Wakeman is currently under way on his newest rock symphony, based on J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. This is reported to be a four-hour composition, taking his "Journey to the Center of the earth" format one step further. Album is set for release in December 1977.

The newest project announced by Christopher Enterprises is a hardcover, extensively illustrated volume of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. With art by Berni Wrightson, this could prove to be the collector's book of the decade. The price tag from this deluxe volume is a healthy, though quite reasonable we're told, \$225. (*Godfrey Daniel!*) And that is not a misprint, kids—that is TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE big ones. For those with lots of loose change, order from Christopher Enterprises, 14164 West Outer Drive, Detroit, Michigan 48239.

For the budding Orson Welles' out there, *Cinemagic* is a nicely-produced magazine covering the "how-to-do-it" aspects of amateur film-making. From model animation to creating life masks, editor Don Dohler and his crew of magicians will show you how to do it all. The latest issue, if you can believe it, features a pictorial on the Queen of Amateur Films, Jamie Lovelace. For a trial issue, send \$1.75 to *Cinemagic*, P. O. Box 125, Perry Hall, Maryland 21128.

When ordering these products, tell 'em CHACAL sent you. And remember, all you talented publishers out there—send news, bribes, threats and alcoholic beverages to us for free publicity. We'll use as much news as is possible each issue.



Illustration by Richard Corben